

Chillin' in Another World

WITH LV 2 SUPERCHEAT POWERS



6

Story by Miya Kinojo
Illustrations by Katagiri





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Characters

Chillin' in Another World with Level 2
Super Cheat Powers



Flio

Former Hero Candidate and
General Store Proprietor.



Rys

Flio's wife, a lupine demon.



Wyne (Human Form)

Freeloader with high stats
and a big appetite.



Elinàsze

Flio and Rys's daughter.



Garyl

Flio and Rys's son.



Tanyalite

A maid who showed up uninvited
(Servant of the Celestial Plane).



Sybe (Psychobear Form)

Flio's pet.



Hiya

The Djinn who Commands
the Origin of Light and Darkness.



Damalynas

The Grand Magus of Midnight. In
training in Hiya's mindscape.



The Maiden Queen

Hardworking queen with
a strong sense of justice.



Belano

A former witch of Klyrode. A
quiet, shy, and skittish teacher.



Blossom

A former knight of Klyrode.
Works hard on the farm.



Greanyl

Shadow demon working for
the Fli-o'-Rys General Store.

Characters

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 Ghozal Once known as the mightiest Dark One in history.	 Uliminas Ghozal's former confederate in the Dark Army and current wife.	 Balirossa A former knight of Klyrode and wife of Ghozal.	
 Hero Gold-Hair On the run from the law despite being the "hero."	 Tsuya Hero Gold-Hair's partner in crime.	 The Shadow King The former King of Klyrode, and head of the Shadow Conglomerate.	
 Yuigarde Ghozal's younger brother and short-tempered Dark One.	 Phufun Yuigarde's minion, a succubus, and an extreme masochist.	 Belianna A foul-mouthed devil.	 Valentine A beguiling djinn and one of the Twelve Evil Generals.
 Calsi'im The hardest worker of the Infernal Four.	 Tia Calsi'im's minion, a magic doll.	 Byleri Former archer of Klyrode living in sin with Sleip.	 Sleip (Human Form) Former member of the Infernal Four.

Super Cheat Powers

Chapter 1: Flio's Busy Day

The world of Klyrode is a world of swords and sorcery, of magic beasts and demihumans—a world where humanity and demonkind had been at war since time immemorial. But then the Dark One Yuigarde abandoned his throne, leaving the ancient veteran skeleton soldier Calsi'im to take his place as Dark Regent.

Taking advantage of the chaos, the devil Zanzibar rallied his rebel army to assault the Dark Citadel, but Calsi'im sought aid from the Wolf of Justice and his companions—mysterious heroes who had interfered time and time again with the Dark Army's designs on the human-ruled Magical Kingdom of Klyrode. The Wolf of Justice agreed to help on the condition that the Dark Army make peace with the Magical Kingdom. With the Wolf of Justice and his companions as allies, the Dark Army overcame seemingly impossible odds and brought an end to Zanzibar's rebellion.

The Dark Regent Calsi'im kept his word to the Wolf of Justice and drafted a treaty with the Magical Kingdom. For the first time in history, the Dark Army and the armies of humanity were at peace. And so, our story begins...

◇Houghtow City—Fli-o'-Rys General Store◇

Houghtow City was a fair distance from the capital, but it was a hub for merchants and adventurers on the road, as it stood at the midpoint of the highway leading from Castle Klyrode to lands abroad. And just outside of one of its markets lay the Fli-o'-Rys General Store, managed by a man known as Flio. It was on the opposite side of town from the city gates, a bit out of the way for visitors from outside. One might have expected it to be a quiet shop in a less busy part of town, but that couldn't be further from the truth. The Fli-o'-Rys General Store was packed with customers from the minute they opened, day after day. Today was no exception.

The proprietor, Flio, was standing by the register. Flio was originally a merchant from another world and had been summoned to Klyrode as a Hero

Candidate. He had received a truly potent blessing when he'd arrived in this world, giving him mastery of every skill and every spell in existence. Now, he ran a general store with his wife Rys (a demon who had once fought for the Dark Army).

Two regular customers, who seemed to be friends, stepped up to the counter. "I'm looking for a sheath for the sword you fixed last time I was here," one of them said. "One you wear on your back, please."

"I need a pack for carrying my stuff," said the other. "The one I've got now is a bit too small. I had a look around the shop, but I was wondering... Do you have anything bigger than the ones on display?"

Flio smiled. "A back scabbard for Mister Sireul and a large pack for Mister Wreek..." he said. "I believe we have some items that may interest you." He waved his hand towards the counter behind him, and a number of back scabbards and large packs appeared, seemingly from thin air.

The items had come from the Bottomless Bag Flio wore on his belt—the one he used to store inventory for the shop.

Originally, in order to do this, the owner of a Bottomless Bag would need to go through the following steps:

Call up the Bottomless Bag's display window.

Select item for retrieval.

Retrieve item from the Bottomless Bag.

Repeat steps one through three until all desired items have been retrieved.

Flio, however, had omitted steps one through four and selected every item he wanted at once, retrieving them all instantly.

It shouldn't have been possible to use a Bottomless Bag this way. Only Flio, with his perfect memory of the shop's inventory, could have pulled off such a trick.

While Flio was showing the merchandise to his customers, Belano was busy with the display shelves. Belano was a teacher at the Houghtow College of Magic, but she had finished her work early today and come to the Fli-o'-Rys

General Store to help out. She had once been a witch serving in a company of knights at Castle Klyrode, but she had quit the army and was now living at Flio's house and teaching defensive magic at the local school. She would occasionally stop by to lend a hand like this on days off from school or when she didn't have many classes to teach.

Lord Flio's amazing, using a Bottomless Bag like that... she thought, gazing at him with admiration. Belano's father and brother had both died in the war against the Dark Army, and Belano had come to see Flio as a standin for her departed family. She idolized him—revered him, even.

Her cheeks flushed red as she continued to watch. *If only Lord Flio were my husband... We could research magic together...and—*

Her thoughts were cut off as she felt something behind her: a presence, not unlike a wolf stalking its prey. She jumped, her body shaking uncontrollably. But when she looked, nothing but the display case was there. Belano's face was pale. Cold sweat ran down her back.

"Wh-What was that...?"

◇Meanwhile—Flio's House◇

Rys looked up from where she was cleaning the living room and stared fiercely at a spot on the wall.

Rys was Flio's husband, a lupine demon. She had belonged to the Dark Army until Flio defeated her, at which point she chose to walk alongside him as his wife. She was *very* fond of her husband and had already had two children with him—twins named Elinàsze and Garyl.

A demonic aura welled up behind Rys. Her eyes became even more wolflike.

Needless to say, she was staring in the direction of the Fli-o'-Rys General Store.

How strange... she thought. *I could have sworn I felt the presence of a woman lusting after my lord husband. Just my imagination, I suppose...*

Suddenly, she returned to herself and resumed sweeping, more vigorous than before. "Oh, I mustn't get distracted like this! If I don't finish the laundry soon,

it won't be dry by this evening!"

◇Back at the Fli-o'-Rys General Store◇

While Belano recovered, Flio pointed to the items on the counter, an easygoing smile on his face. "Here's some items we had in storage," he said. "Do any of them strike your fancy?"

His customers stared with wide eyes. "Whoa! A-Already?! You really are something else..."

"You took all those out at once...?"

As stunned as they were, however, it didn't stop them from looking over the inventory.

Almost immediately, however, a great flock of adventurers descended on Flio—dozens of them, at least.

"Hey, Mister Flio... I wanna buy this axe!"

"I need a number of magic wands..."

"I have a question about this potion..."

"Excuse me, I need my shield repaired!"

There's so many of them! Flio thought, hiding his nerves behind a smile. *I can't deal with them all at once... I might need Uliminas's help...*

He looked over to Uliminas's register. Uliminas was a hellcat who had assisted Ghozal when he had been the Dark One before Yuigarde. Ghozal had abdicated his throne and quit the Dark Army. Now, he too was an employee of the Fli-o'-Rys General Store, and Uliminas was one of his two wives.

Flio tried to get Uliminas's attention, but she seemed to be busy with a problem of her own.

"I want one of those Wolf of Justice masks you have on display!"

"Me too!"

"I want one too!"

"Give *me* one!"

“I would like one as well, please!”

A great horde of happy children had gathered before her, clamoring for the Wolf of Justice masks on display behind the register. Uliminas worked quickly, smiling fondly at the kids as she retrieved the masks from the wooden box by her feet. “Meowne sec!” she said. “Sorry to keep mew waiting! Blue Wolf of Justice masks for everymeowne!”

Flio had originally designed the Wolf of Justice mask to conceal his identity, but now that the Wolf of Justice had become a hero whose exploits were sung of the world over for bringing peace between the Dark Army and the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode, it had become a best-selling item. Most of the buyers were children, but some people bought them as protective talismans for their homes or for long journeys. Right now, it was the most popular thing for sale at the Flio-o’-Rys General Store.

They even sold plush versions of the great white wolf who fought by the Wolf of Justice’s side. This was Rys, of course, in her wolf form. But she made for a very cute toy. There were also reproductions of the red wolf mask Wyne wore and the black one worn by Ghozal.

Uliminas, behind the counter, had her hands absolutely full with the kids. She noticed Flio’s glance in her direction, but all she could do was shake her head apologetically. *I’m a bit purreoccupied right meow...*



Flio raised his hand apologetically. *Maybe I should ask Balirossa, then...* he thought, looking across the store to see Balirossa jogging by with a large wooden crate in her arms.

Balirossa was Ghozal's other wife. She had once been a knight from Klyrode Castle, but she had quit along with the rest of her company and now lived at Flio's house.

Balirossa set the crate down in front of a case and began setting out its contents for display. But she had scarcely set them down when the customers, who had been waiting for that shelf to be restocked, immediately began snatching them up.

Balirossa looks pretty busy too... Flio thought. *Maybe Mister Ghozal...?* He glanced over to the wall by the register where Ghozal stood.

Ghozal had once reigned as Dark One under the name Gholl, but he had abdicated in favor of his younger brother Yuigarde and now lived as a freeloader at Flio's house, disguised as a human. He and Flio had become something like best friends. Right now, he was standing still, watching the scene at the register—the children gleefully accepting Wolf of Justice masks from Uliminas. He seemed to be muttering something under his breath.

"I mean," he said to himself, "I can't really be surprised that the Wolf of Justice mask is the most popular...but Wyne's, Hiya's, and Damalynas's masks have been selling, and those plushes of Rys... How come nobody wants to buy my Black Wolf mask...?" It was already a fair way into the day, but not a single person had purchased a Black Wolf mask.

Flio smirked wryly. *I guess Mister Ghozal's busy in his own way,* he thought. *All right. I'll just handle this on my own.* He turned to face the crowd of customers when a magic circle appeared on the wall behind him. Two feminine figures stepped out.

"Exalted One," said Hiya. "Forgive my impertinence, but if you are in need of assistance, your humble servant Hiya stands at the ready."

"I'll help too!" said Damalynas.

Hiya was known as the djinn who commands the origin of light and darkness.

Their magic power was vast enough to destroy the entire world, but after being defeated by Flio, they became part of his household and now called him the “Exalted One.” Damalynas was the Grand Magus of Midnight, master of the dark arts. She had been defeated by Hiya, however, and now spent her time training with the djinn in their mindscape.

“Oh!” said Flio, breathing a sigh of relief. “Thanks, you two.”

“There is no need for thanks,” answered Hiya. “To serve you is nothing less than the very reason for my existence.”

“Of course!” Damalynas said. “It’s the least I can do.”

The two turned towards the throng of customers. Hiya and Damalynas answered questions about potions or magic items while Flio dealt with customers who needed weapons or anything else. With the effort of three, the work went much faster, but no sooner did one customer leave than another would take their place. It looked like the store was going to be packed for a while yet. In fact, at some point, a line had started to form, leading all the way out the entryway and onto the street.

◇Fli-o’-Rys General Store—Wagon Staging Area◇

Behind the Fli-o’-Rys General Store was the wagon staging area, large enough for ten wagons at a time. A number of women dressed as adventurers were busily moseying about. Some of them were loading goods onto wagons, while others were double-checking the inventories of the wagons that had newly arrived.

One of the women seemed to be especially busy. This was Greanyl, a shadow demon. She had once been a member of the Silent Listeners, the Dark Army’s intelligence apparatus, but the Silent Listeners had defected en masse and now served as the Fli-o’-Rys General Store’s supply team, with Greanyl at the head.

Greanyl stopped in front of an empty wagon. She looked between it and the papers in her hand. “Where’s this wagon’s cargo?” she asked.

At those words, a woman who had been working in the storehouse ran up to her. “I’ll have it loaded right away!” she said.

“Be quick,” said Greanyl. “We’ll have more wagons returning in a minute.”

“By your command.” The woman bowed and ran back to the storehouse at top speed.

When she was gone, Greanyl boarded the driver’s seat of one of the wagons. “I’m off to make the delivery to Klyrode Castle,” she said. “I’ll leave the rest to you.”

“Understood. Take care.” The women nearby bowed as Greanyl departed.

Greanyl’s wagon was pulled by a great demon horse, much bigger than a common horse. Greanyl took the reins and set her sights on the road ahead. The demon horse turned his head back to speak to her. “So I’m with the leader of the supply team herself today,” he said. “It’s a pleasure.”

“The pleasure is all mine,” Greanyl said, bowing her head. “It’s an honor to work with Sir Dalc Horst, captain of the demon horses.”

Dalc Horst was once the direct subordinate of Sleip—a member of the Dark Army’s Infernal Four—and was the leader of his elite guard. He, Sleip, and the rest of Sleip’s elite guard had all left the Dark Army and now lived at the stables outside Flio’s house. These days, they pulled wagons for the Fli-o’-Rys supply teams.

“But it’s strange...” Greanyl said, looking curiously at Dalc Horst. “I was sure that I was scheduled to work with your subordinate Alchechino...”

“Ah, my apologies... I’m afraid there was a bit of trouble. It’s nothing you need to worry about. We should focus on our own work.” Dalc Horst spoke quickly, like he was nervous about something.

Greanyl cocked her head. “I see...” she said. “Well, I don’t have any cause to complain, but...”

“A-Anyway!” Dalc Horst said, in a hurry to change the subject. “The shop’s been busy lately, hasn’t it? We’re making deliveries to cities all over, and the storefront’s packed to the brim every day...”

Greanyl nodded. “It’s because our work delivering supplies to the front for Klyrode Castle went as well as it did. Now that the Dark Army and the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode have signed that peace treaty, Klyrode Castle has declared us a trustworthy establishment with first-class products. Ever since then,

customers have been pouring into the store nonstop, and we've been getting large delivery requests from cities and towns all over the land."

"I'm glad for it," Dalc Horst opined. "It gives us demon horses plenty to do."

"I understand..." Greanyl said. "I'm forever grateful to Lord Flio for taking the Silent Listeners in when we had nowhere else to go. I'm happy to work to repay the favor." She took the reins in her hands and held them tight.

Dalc Horst nodded. "Well said," he agreed. "By the way, Greanyl. Do you think we can take some time to ourselves once our work at the castle is finished?"

"I suppose, if it isn't too long."

"Then why don't we have dinner together?" Dalc Horst said. "My subordinates told me about a restaurant in Klyrode Castle that serves amazing food..."

"A meal?" Greanyl's expression was blank. "No thank you. I need to complete my observation of the castle town. But feel free to go yourself."

"O-Oh..." Dalc Horst said, sighing to himself. "Okay..."

Greanyl looked at him curiously. Maybe it was just her imagination, but it looked like Dalc Horst's head was slumped dejectedly as he trotted along the road. Regardless, she took out her paperwork and began looking over her next tasks.

Before long, they had passed through the city gates and continued on down the highway towards Klyrode Castle.

◇Houghtow City—Flio's House◇

That evening, Rys stood in front of the house. She was checking on the laundry she had left out to dry on a pole in the garden. "Hmm..." she said. "Nice and dry. That's a relief." Satisfied, she smiled and began to retrieve the laundry. It was hard to imagine that this woman had once been the top pick for the next Infernal.

"Now, I had best get this in quickly so I can start on dinner. My lord husband and the others will be back from their work at the shop soon, and Garyl and Elinàsze will be back from school..." She hurried along, bringing the laundry

inside.

Currently living in Flio's house were Flio and Rys, their twins Elinàsze and Garyl, and Wyne, who had ended up becoming their adopted daughter at some point. Then there was Ghozal and his wives Uliminas and Balirossa, and Sleip and Byleri, who weren't technically married but might as well have been. Finally, there was Blossom and Belano, formerly of the knights of Klyrode, and the household pet Sybe. In total, there were twelve people and one pet living under the same roof, and Rys was responsible for doing the housework for all of them.

Hiya and Damalynas, as well as their new companion Maglion, a djinn from the Realm of Evil, had living quarters inside Hiya's mindscape. They had no need for laundry or the like, but would join the rest of the household for meals, making Rys's task that much more difficult.

"Like, Lady Rys!" Byleri, who had been working in the large pasture in front of Flio's house, noticed Rys taking in the laundry and ran over, a big smile on her face. "Do you, like, want any help with the laundry?"

Byleri had been the archer of the company of knights that left Klyrode Castle and now lived with Flio. Byleri excelled at taking care of horses and spent her time looking after horse-type magic beasts when she wasn't enjoying her blissful relationship with Sleip.

Byleri ran as fast as she could—which wasn't very fast, owing to her excessively girly running style. A demon horse trotted up to her. He was an enormous black stallion with red markings in a flame-like pattern across his body.

"Care for a ride?"

"Oh, Lord Sleip! Like, totally! Thank you!"

Sleip—the stallion—picked Byleri up by her collar and plopped her down on his back. Sleip had once been one of the Infernal Four, but like so many others, he had quit the Dark Army and now lived at Flio's house, looking after the horse-type magic beasts. He was very old, but his age didn't seem to be a problem for Byleri. They were very much in love.

“Like, thank you, Lord Sleip!” Byleri said, blushing and wrapping her arms around Sleip’s thick neck.

“No need to mention it,” Sleip said. “It was nothing!” In spite of his age, he sounded quite excited.

On Sleip’s back, Byleri reached the laundry in no time, but...

“Wh-What?”

“Like...huh?”

The two stared blankly. Rys was gone, and the laundry was nowhere in sight. Only the pole remained. In the time it had taken Sleip and Byleri to reach the front of the house, Rys had finished with the laundry and left.

“She works as fast as ever, I see...” Sleip said.

“Like, seriously! I just looked away for, like, a second...” added Byleri. The two smirked at each other.

Just then, a cart rolled up, pulled along by Sybe in its psychobear form as Blossom walked alongside it. “Hm?” Blossom said. “What brings you two here?”

Sybe had once been a wild psychobear who happened to randomly encounter Flio. Realizing immediately that it had no chance of victory, it surrendered. Since then, it had lived with Flio’s household as their pet. It spent most of its time in the unicorn-rabbit form Flio had given it with his magic.

Blossom, meanwhile, had been the heavy fighter of Balirossa’s old company in the knights. She was Balirossa’s best friend, and had quit the company alongside her to live with Flio. Blossom came from a farming family and was a pro at farm work. She used those skills to run the large farm outside Flio’s house.

“Oh!” Byleri said. “Like, hi, Blossom! Hi, Sybe! Are you, like, bringing those veggies in for dinner?”

“Yup, that’s the idea. It’s around the time Lady Rys usually gets a start on dinner. I thought I’d bring her some of our freshly harvested vegetables!”

“Like, lemme help! I wanna help Lady Rys, like, cook for us!” She got down off Sleip’s back. “Easy does it...”

When Byleri's feet were back on solid ground, Sleip transformed into his human form. "Then I'll go take care of things in the pasture," he said. He turned and headed back for the stables.

"Lord Sleip!" Byleri shouted after him. "You, like, forgot something!"

"Hm? I did?" Sleip came running back to find Byleri facing him with her eyes closed, lips puckered up. "O-Oh! S-So, you mean..." *A kiss...* he thought. *But...* Sleip glanced over at where Blossom was standing.

"I'm not lookin'!" said Blossom, covering her eyes with her hands. "Go ahead and kiss her!"

"Gwowrf!" agreed Sybe, following suit.

"V-Very well..." Sleip knitted his eyebrows, but he couldn't resist Byleri when she was right there in front of him, waiting for a kiss with her lips puckered up so adorably. He slowly drew close and touched his lips to hers, silently kissing her.

Suddenly, Wyne appeared right beside them. "Whoa!" she said.

Wyne was a dragonewt—the strongest warriors among dragonkind. She had collapsed from hunger and was saved by Flio and Rys. She had since become part of the family and was a doting big sister to Garyl and Elinàsze.

"Wha—?! Wyne?!" Sleip pulled away from the kiss in a hurry.

"Hey, butt out, Wyne!" cried Blossom. "Things were getting good!"

"Gwor! Gwor!" agreed Sybe.

In truth, both of them had been peeking between their fingers.

"What?!" Sleip was indignant. "I knew it! You *were* looking!"

"Hey, hey, um," Wyne was looking at Sleip, puzzled. "What were you doing with By-By, Sleis-Sleis?"

"Ngh! Wyne, you're too young for things like that."

"Come oooon!" Wyne protested, doing her best to wheedle the answer out of Sleip. "Tell me! Tell me! I wanna know!"

"W-Well!" Byleri announced. "I'm, like, gonna help Lady Rys in the kitchen!"

“B-Byleri!” said Sleip. “Don’t leave me here!”

“Like, bye! Good luck with the pasture, Lord Sleip!” Byleri bolted, her face red, as Sleip fruitlessly reached an arm out towards her.

“I guess we’d better get the veggies to the kitchen, huh?” said Blossom.

“Gowrf,” said Sybe.

The two ran off after Byleri.

“Y-You too?! W-Wait!” Sleip tried to follow, only to find his hand caught in an iron grip. Wyne was a lot smaller than him, but despite appearances, she possessed the unimaginable strength of a dragonewt. Sleip was stuck.

“Hey, Sleis-Sleis! What were you doing? Tell me!”

“I-I... That was...” he began. “You’re too young for this, you know.”

“Meanie, meanie!” Wyne complained. “I wanna knooooow!”

Overwhelmed by her pleas, Sleip faltered. “Y-You...” he said. “Damned dragonewts and their ridiculous strength... This isn’t something that would interest you!”

“Huh? Well, just tell me!”

Sleip continued to fumble for words. Seeing him like this, it was hard to imagine that he was once the longest-serving of the Infernal Four.



Some time later, Rys and Byleri were busying themselves setting the big table in the middle of the living room and preparing for dinner.

“Hooray!” Wyne cheered. “Food! Food! I love mama’s cooking!” Even after they had gone indoors, Wyne hadn’t let up on Sleip, begging him again and again to tell her what he’d been doing with Byleri. But now that dinner was on the table, the target of her attention had switched. Sleip glanced at her with an exasperated expression on his face as Elinàsze, wearing an apron, placed a heaping plate of food on the table.

Wyne stuck her face right up against the plate and took a deep breath, inhaling the scent of the food as deeply as she could. “Mmmm! It smells so

good! Can I eat it? Can I eat it?!” She looked up at Elinàsze, her eyes shining. Her dragon tail, which she usually kept hidden, materialized, wagging like she was an excited dog.

Elinàsze smiled dryly at her older sister. Elinàsze was the older of Flio and Rys’s twins. Because her mother, Rys, was a demon, she was growing at an astonishing pace. “You’ll have to wait a little longer, big sis Wyne,” she said. “Everyone should be back from their work at the store soon.”

“Aww...” Wyne pouted. “When’s dada and everyone getting home? I wanna eat...” She pressed her face right up against her plate, a line of drool dribbling down from the corner of her mouth.

“You sure are a ravenous one, Wyne,” said Blossom, smirking at the young dragonewt from her seat.

But Wyne wasn’t listening. She was breathing heavily, her eyes fixed on the plate of food before her. “When’s dada and everyone getting home?” she repeated. “When’s dada and everyone getting home?!”

Just then, Garyl, the younger twin, burst into the living room. He was growing up quickly, just like his sister Elinàsze. “Whoa!” he said. “That looks amazing! Can I have a bite yet, sis?” He brought his face right up next to Wyne’s, breathing in the scent of dinner.

Elinàsze placed her hands on her hips and pursed her lips. Then, she poked her brother on the nose, holding her finger there for a good long time. “Garyl!” she said. “You’re meant to wash your hands when you come in from outside! How many times have papa and mama had to tell you?!”

“Oh, crap! I forgot!” Garyl jumped out of his chair and bolted towards the bathroom.

“Wha?!” Wyne also sprung to her feet. “I forgot too! I gotta wash my hands!” She ran off after Garyl.

“Big sis Wyne, not you too...” Elinàsze said, smirking as the two ran off. “*Honestly...*”

“Ha ha ha!” Sleip laughed merrily. “Even the mighty dragonewt Wyne is helpless before Elinàsze!”

“Now, now, grandpa Sleip,” Elinàsze said, smiling happily. “Wyne is our beloved big sister. Her being a dragonewt has nothing to do with it.”

“Hmm...” Sleip thought. “You’re right, of course.” He nodded. *She’s so trusting of Wyne, a full demon...* he thought. *She really is a good kid.*

“Like,” said Byleri, “I hope our kids are as good as her, y’know?”

“Yes, indeed!” Sleip began, nodding. “Wait...Byleri?! When did you get here?!” At some point when he hadn’t been paying attention, Byleri had settled into the chair next to him.

Byleri blinked. “Like, just a bit ago?” she said. “Is, like, something wrong?”

Sleip cleared his throat very deliberately. “N-Not at all!” he said. “Everything is fine. Yes.” *Have I gotten that much worse at sensing someone’s presence?* he wondered. *Or is Byleri actually skilled enough to evade my senses...?* Sleip looked over at Byleri, who turned red and smiled cheerfully when she noticed him glancing her way. *Ahhh... But when I see that smile of hers, I feel like it makes no difference either way. Strange...* He smiled back.

Before long, Rys had brought the final plate to the table, just in time for a magic circle to appear on the wall of the living room. It shone with golden light, and a door appeared. The door opened, and there stood Flio and company. The now-dark Fli-o’-Rys General Store, which was closed for the day, could be seen on the other side of the portal.

Rys and Elinàsze ran over when they saw Flio, smiling happily.

“Welcome home, my lord husband!” said Rys.

“Papa! Welcome home!” said Elinàsze.

“Oh! Dada, you’re back! You’re back!” said Wyne, who had just finished washing her hands.

“Dad! Welcome home!” said Garyl. He and Wyne ran up to their father as well.

Flio was surrounded by his adoring family, unable to move away from the front of the door. “Thank you so much for welcoming me home, everyone,” he said. “But can you step aside a bit? Otherwise everyone else won’t be able to

make it through the door.”

“Yeah!” Uliminas chimed in from right behind Flio. “Mew’ve got us trapped in here!”

Rys glanced at Uliminas. “Oh! My apologies. This way, my lord husband...” She took Flio’s arm in hers and led him to his usual chair. Elinàsze clung to his other arm, and Wyne wrapped herself around his back. Garyl walked in front, as if he were guiding them.

“Hold on a moment!” Flio said. “I need to wash my hands first.” He stepped towards the bathroom.

“I’ll go wash my hands with you, my lord husband,” volunteered Rys.

“I’ll wash my hands too, papa,” said Elinàsze.

“Let me come! Let me come!” begged Wyne.

“I guess I’ll wash my hands again too then!” declared Garyl.

And so, the entire family headed off towards the bathroom together.

“They’re as ameowrous as ever, I see...” said Uliminas, grinning as she watched them go.

“Yes, I suppose so...” said Balirossa, nodding in agreement. “I would like to have a family like that one day...”

The two turned their gazes to where Ghozal was sitting, his arms folded as he waited silently for dinner. He was glancing at them out of the corner of his eye.

“Ghozal...” Uliminas asked. “Did mew wash *meowr* hands yet?”

“Hrm?” answered Ghozal. “I’ll do it with magic. It’ll only take a second.” He muttered a spell under his breath and his hands began to glow. An instant later, they were purified.

Uliminas and Balirossa heaved a heavy sigh in unison. “Mew purromised not to use meowgic to wash meowr hands...” Uliminas said. “For the children’s education...”

“H-Hrm?!” Ghozal sputtered. “That’s right! I had forgotten!” He sprung to his feet and ran off in the direction of the bathroom.

Once more, his wives sighed as they watched him go. “I’m worried about meowr future children...” Uliminas said.

“You’re right...” said Balirossa. “I suppose you and I will have to be the responsible ones, Ser Uliminas...”

“It’s gonna be a huge pain with a husband like that...”

“I can’t disagree, I’m afraid...”

Ghozal’s wives shared a knowing grimace.

◇The Shack Behind Flio’s House◇

After dinner, Flio went out behind the house, where a two-story shack he had built with magic not long ago stood. He stepped inside, into a large room where a person was working alone, making the same merchandise sold at the Fli-o’-Rys General Store. He worked at an alarming pace, producing multiple swords and shields as well as other items a minute. They were all of exceptional quality, but rather than spending inordinate amounts of time on each item, the person moved on to the next as soon as one was done.

It would normally have taken several skilled blacksmiths more than a week to make even one of those items, but the person in this room wasn’t only making them in a matter of minutes—he was also enchanting them individually with healing or fire or other enchantments. The wooden crates behind him were full of completed masterworks.

“Thanks for working late today, Minilio,” Flio said, stepping forward. Minilio stopped working and looked up at him.

Minilio was a magic doll of Flio’s creation. He looked exactly like a younger version of Flio, so Flio had taken to calling him Minilio. Sometimes, he used magic to appear to be the same size as regular Flio and deal with customers at the Fli-o’-Rys General Store in Flio’s stead.

Minilio bowed deeply.

“Good job,” Flio said, placing a hand on Minilio’s head. “That’s enough for today.” A light shone from his hand, enveloping Minilio. Flio was charging the magic gem that served as Minilio’s energy source with his own magic power. It

was that magic that gave Minilio the superhuman ability to produce high-quality weapons and merchandise in such vast quantities.

Minilio smiled. Perhaps being charged was a pleasant sensation.

At this point, Rys stepped into the shack. Her eyes went wide when she saw the mountain of merchandise filling the room. “Goodness, Minilio!” she said. “Did you really make all this just today?”

Flio smiled and nodded. “Having Minilio in charge of producing merchandise has been a real lifesaver,” he said. “He works fast and doesn’t need much.”

“If magic dolls are so extraordinary, why don’t you make two or three more of them?” Rys asked. “Would that not reduce your workload still further, my lord husband? With your ability and magic power, I’m sure you would be able to...”

“That’s true...” Flio said. “I could make more magic dolls if I wanted to...but I’ve already decided that Minilio will be the only one.”

“You have?” Rys looked confused.

“When I first made Minilio,” he said, “I had the thought that creating a magic doll isn’t so different from creating a human. I don’t think I should go around making living creatures for a selfish reason like helping me with the shop...” Flio smiled at Minilio, and Minilio smiled back.

“I see...” Rys looked over at the two. *From what Ghozal said, magic dolls are used like tools until their magic jewels run out of power and then disposed of. But my lord husband says that they’re living beings like us...*

Minilio, now fully recharged, began to work again, but Flio stopped him, a forbearing smile on his face.

He is such a kind man, my lord husband...

◇That Night—Flio and Rys’s Room◇

After making sure everything was in order, Flio used magic to send the items Minilio had made to the Fli-o’-Rys storeroom. Then, he, Rys, and their children all took a bath together before he retired to his room with his wife.

Rys was sitting in front of the dresser, doing her hair. She glanced over at Flio. “The Fli-o’-Rys General Store has been doing quite a lot of business lately,

hasn't it? I believe I heard Uliminas screaming for joy just the other day."

Flio sat on the bed, giving Rys one of his easygoing smiles. "It has," he said. "It seems word's gotten out about all the orders we've filled for Klyrode Castle. We've been getting enormous requests from cities all over, and I swear more customers show up every day."

"Are you holding up all right?" Rys asked, a worried look on her face. "Perhaps I should help out at the shop as well..."

"No, that's all right," Flio said. "You have your hands full at home, after all."

"Not at all! I can have it done in a heartbeat! I can do anything if my lord husband asks it of me!" She grinned, flexing an arm.

So she says... Flio thought. But she's already doing all the housework and laundry, and even making lunch for Greanyl and the rest of the Silent Listeners...

Rys walked up to Flio as he watched her pensively. "My lord husband?" she said, sitting down next to him on the bed. "You know I have no greater pleasure than serving you, do you not? If there is something you need of me, please don't hesitate to ask." She smiled.

"Of course," Flio said, smiling back as he pulled her into his arms. "Let's both do our best, Rys."

"Yes, my lord husband." Rys smiled up at him. "You know, I overheard Uliminas and Balirossa saying that Fli-o'-Rys might be opening a branch store?"

"We've been working on it. But there are so many cities who want us there, and lots of hassles to take care of. We need to figure out where to build it, and then there's the issue of staff... We could hire people for the new store, but it's hard to find good merchants who aren't already employed somewhere..."

"Then perhaps you could offer a larger salary than other businesses and try to pull away some skilled workers?"

"The merchant's guild has all kinds of rules and regulations about that. It's not that easy."

"I see..." Rys said. "It's a common practice for demon merchants to lure away talented people with great sums of money, but I suppose humans are

different...” Rys pressed her index finger to her lips and inclined her head in thought.

“It’ll be all right,” Flio said. “Everyone’s already working hard at the one store. I don’t want to open a branch before we’re good and ready.”

“I see... Well, I’m sure you’ll be able to do it.” Rys smiled softly and nuzzled close. “You always seem so excited when you talk about the shop, my lord husband...”

Her cheek pressed up against her husband’s chest, Rys gently closed her eyes. Slowly, Flio brought his lips to hers. They held each other tight in a loving embrace, kissing tenderly as they lay down on the bed. Flio gestured with his index finger towards the magic lantern and it went out, leaving the room in darkness.



Day broke, and Flio opened his eyes to find that Rys, who had fallen asleep with her head on his arm after a night of lovemaking, was already gone. He heard Blossom’s lively voice from outside the window. “Good morning, Lady Rys!”

Flio, who had fallen asleep naked, changed into the night clothes that Rys had neatly folded and placed at the side of their bed and ran to the window. He opened the curtains to see Blossom and Sybe, pulling its cart in its psychobear form. The two of them had stopped to greet Rys, who seemed to have just returned from the forest.

Rys was in her lupine demon form, and on her back was a great bounty of game she must have hunted. “I see you two are hard at work early in the morning again,” Rys said. “Today’s hunt was very fruitful—I hope you’re ready for an incredible breakfast!”

“Yeah!” Blossom cheered. “I can’t wait! Meat really is where it’s at.”

“Gworf!” agreed Sybe as the two gave each other a high five. Rys watched and cheerfully wagged her tail.

“Rys is a lot of help...” Flio said to himself as he watched from the second-story window. “But she really is pushing herself too hard. And things are only

going to get busier from here. I should probably help with housework more often...”

Flio changed into his usual outfit with magic and teleported down to the first floor.

“Oh! Good morning, my lord husband!” Rys, who had made it to the back door leading into the kitchen, bowed her lupine head low as her husband appeared before her. She must have been happy to see him—her tail started to wag with even greater intensity.

“Good morning, Rys,” Flio said. “Are you planning on preparing that magic beast meat right away?”

“I was.”

“Let me help you, then.”

“My lord husband?!” Rys exclaimed, turning into her human form. “That would never do! You need to take care of your precious body! After all, today will be another busy day for you at the store! I can handle this on my own.”

Rys ran to the kitchen to get the tools she needed to prepare the meat. “R-Rys!” Flio said, blushing furiously. “Wh-What are you...?”

“Hm? O-Oh!!!” Rys went extremely red herself and hastily covered up her chest with her hands—she had forgotten that she was naked.

Demihumans and demons generally didn’t wear clothes in their beast forms. Unfortunately, that meant they ended up naked when they transformed into their humanoid forms. Rys knew this, of course. She had even left a change of clothes for herself in the shade of a tree by the back entrance. But she had been so happy to see Flio that she had completely forgotten.

“I-I’m so terribly sorry, my lord husband! That was unthinkable shameless of me!” She ran to the tree and began to get dressed.

“N-No, it’s okay...” Flio said, averting his gaze. “I-I mean... Sorry.”

The two of them were both quite red.

The Dark Regent's chambers were on the second floor of the Dark Citadel, the same floor as the chambers used by the Infernal Four. The Dark One's chambers were adjoining the throne room, but as the Dark One Yuigarde was still missing, the skeleton Calsi'im was now in charge, and he preferred to stay in the chambers he had used as an Infernal.

"Hmm..." Calsi'im sighed ponderously as he looked over the mountain of paperwork on his desk, tilting his head left and right.

"Calsi'im, is something the matter?" Calsi'im's minion, the magic doll Tia, walked up to him.

"Oh, Tia!" Calsi'im exclaimed. "Nothing's the matter at all! I was just thinking about the former rebels..."

"If I'm not mistaken, they pledged loyalty to you and rejoined the Dark Army after the fall of Zanzibar. Is there some problem?"

"Well, I suppose you could say that..." Calsi'im handed Tia a piece of paper.

Tia looked it over. "Dark Citadel Expenditure Report..." she read. "This must be a report prepared by our department of finance... O-Oh, goodness! This is..."

Tia was at a loss for words. According to the expenditure report, although the cost of retaining the Dark Citadel's personnel had gone up considerably, income hadn't increased in the slightest.

"Yes, well, you see," Calsi'im said, "it was a great expense for us to reemploy all of those former rebels. And our vassals are still waiting to see what happens! It seems that many of them haven't made up their mind whether to pay tribute or not!"

"M-My..." Tia said, her shoulders shaking. "It was already quite a grave offense for them to wait and see when the Dark Army needed their help... But for them to continue with such opportunism now that the rebel army has been suppressed..."

The Dark Army had originally accepted tribute from their vassal demon clans in exchange for the Dark Army's patronage and permission to hold territory within Dark Army lands. These tributes were the basis for the Dark Citadel's operations.

“Calsi’im!” Tia said, enraged. “This is proof that they are not taking you seriously as the Dark Regent! I will take Good Sir Caw-lins and go immediately to gather tribute!”

Good Sir Caw-lins, the dire crow who was perched on a tree in the middle of the room, flared his wings in anger and let out a mighty “Ca-caw—!”

“Now, now,” said Calsi’im. “Both of you calm down. There really is nothing we can do about it! Many of our subjects didn’t approve of me making peace with the humans on my own when the Dark One Yuigarde was away...”

“Nonetheless!” Tia said, bolting to her feet. “We would have had no need to do so if they had come to our aid, as they swore to do! These demons only care about protecting their own positions! In fact, is not their failure to assist us in repelling the rebel army enough reason to demand they pay restitution? It’s not too late! Just say the word, Calsi’im, and I and Good Sir Caw-lins will—”

Calsi’im stepped in front of Tia and placed a bony hand on her shoulder. “Thank you so much for worrying about me, Tia. I really appreciate the concern.”

“C-Calsi’im?”

“But even if we reproach our subjects and demand money, we don’t know when Lord Yuigarde will return. Without him, Lady Yorminyt, and Lords Hugi-Mugi, there would be little to stop another rebellion if we anger them too much! Perhaps I should ask the Wolf of Justice for his help one more time...”

“Ah...” Tia didn’t know how to respond. *It’s true... she thought. If another rebellion happens, it will be Calsi’im’s responsibility as Dark Regent to handle it... But the last time we asked the Wolf of Justice for help, he wanted us to sign a peace treaty with the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode as equals... Now that we’ve given him what he wants, what conditions will he place on his assistance...?* Tia gulped. “C-Calsi’im,” she said. “What should we do...?”

“Hmm... I wonder...” Calsi’im rested his jawbone on his hand. “Well, it takes a thief to catch a thief, as they say. Perhaps there is someone I should speak to...”

Hobbling on his cane, the old skeleton left the room.

Beneath the Dark Citadel was an underground dungeon. In one corner, guarded by the pandaman Rayne and the spider demon luki, was a cell holding a single, solitary demon.

“Well?”

The prisoner looked with exasperation at Calsi'im, who had come to visit him. “So the Dark Citadel is having money problems,” he said. “I suppose I'm not surprised that the other demon clans haven't been paying tribute. But why would you come ask *me* about it? Am I not the leader of the rebellion you and the Wolf of Justice destroyed?” The prisoner—the devil Zanzibar—curled the corners of his mouth into a smirk.

“Oh dear, I'm afraid you've got me dead to rights!” Calsi'im said, scratching his skull. “It's quite embarrassing, but I know very little about making money, you see. I thought perhaps I might ask your opinion! You're quite the expert at it, I hear.”

Zanzibar's smirk grew even wicked. “You are a strange one, all right,” he said. “Most Dark Ones would have a rebel leader beheaded the moment they were in their power, but you've been feeding me three meals a day in this cell, even with your money problems. And now you're coming to me for advice?”

“You are quite right!” Calsi'im said. “But I have heard that you are a cunning businessman, famed even among devils for your vast riches. I thought perhaps that you might let me borrow just a little of your wisdom...”

“Hmph.” Zanzibar sighed heavily. *So he'll even listen to a former rebel leader if what they have to say is useful... He didn't hesitate to go to the Wolf of Justice either... He secured a powerful ally by signing a peace treaty with Klyrode. He's certainly more open-minded than Yuigarde. Better judgment too...*

“Fine,” Zanzibar said. He reached into his hair and pulled out a small scroll he had kept hidden. “Take this.”

“What is it?” Calsi'im asked as he slowly opened the scroll. As he did so, it suddenly grew in size. It was a map of the area around the Dark Citadel. Here and there were a number of places marked with a red X.

“The marks on the map are the villas where my wealth is hidden,” Zanzibar

said. “First, you should recover the treasure there. That should tide us over while we reconsider how the Dark Army should operate from here on.”

“Wh-What?! T-Truly, Mister Zanzibar?!”

“Why not?” Zanzibar said. “Someone will find the treasure sooner or later. I would much rather it be the man who defeated me.” He grinned fiendishly.

“I see, I see!” said Calsi’im. “Although I don’t know if I’d say it was *me* who defeated you. Thank you! I will use this money on behalf of everyone in the Dark Citadel!”

Calsi’im held out his hand. Zanzibar reached through the bars of his cell to give it a firm shake.

◇Klyrode Castle—Conference Hall◇

While Calsi’im and Zanzibar were shaking hands, the various persons of import in Klyrode Castle had gathered for a conference. The Maiden Queen sat at the head of the table, speaking to the assembled crowd between glances at the paperwork in her hands.

“And therefore,” she continued in her stately voice, “now that we have signed a treaty of peace with the Dark Army, I believe it is a favorable time to pay visits to the parts of the land I rarely have a chance to see, to learn more of conditions there. Of course, with all my duties, I must keep these visits somewhat brief. I will take Knight Captain MacTaulo and Boralis, the captain of the Queen’s Royal Guard, with me for security. I believe it would be best to have only a small guard of elite soldiers so as not to raise too much alarm.”

“Yes, Your Majesty!” MacTaulo and Boralis, who were seated at the foot of the table, both rose and bowed deeply.

The Maiden Queen nodded, satisfied. “Thus concludes my report. Does anyone have a question they wish to ask of me?”

“Terribly sorry to bother you, Your Majesty...” A number of ministers raised their hands at once. The Queen called them to speak one at a time and gave coherent, logical answers to all of their concerns. Needless to say, most of the questions were about the peace treaty with the Dark Army.



Before long, the conference adjourned. The Maiden Queen left the conference hall, walking through the castle hallways alongside the Third Princess.

“It seems the meetings have all been about the peace treaty lately, my sister the Queen,” the Third Princess said, pursing her lips in discontent. “And after I researched matters so thoroughly as to answer any questions they might ask... I can’t help but feel a little disappointed!” As if to testify to the truth of her words, she was carrying a truly massive stack of papers in her hands.

The Third Princess was the Maiden Queen’s considerably younger sister. She had graduated at the top of her class from a famous academy attended by many children of nobles and ministers. She had become her sister’s aide the very instant she graduated and served as an invaluable asset in internal administration. She was very capable, and although she had been employed for only a short amount of time, there were few who knew more of the affairs of the kingdom.

The Maiden Queen laughed. “I greatly appreciate your work,” she said. “You’ve been a tremendous help to me.”

“I-I have?!” A dopey smile crossed over the Third Princess’s face at the words of praise from her beloved sister. “But my sister, when you were First Princess, you did many times the work I am doing now to utmost perfection! C- Compared to you, I’m afraid I still have a lot to learn...”

The Maiden Queen gave her sister an indulgent smile.

“My sister the Queen,” the Third Princess went on. “Might I be permitted to ask a question?”

“Of course! What is it?”

“Just something that’s been on my mind... You say you intend to visit ‘parts of the land you rarely have a chance to see,’ but where specifically do you mean? You haven’t given me any documentation, or even a solid itinerary...”

The Maiden Queen twitched. Her face went stiff. “W-Well,” she said. “A- About that. I still haven’t finalized my plans, I’m afraid. That’s the only reason I

haven't yet let you know..."

"Ah," said the Princess, breathing a sigh of relief. "I see. I hope you'll let me know when it is officially decided."

"O-Of course! Certainly!" the Maiden Queen said, oddly flustered. *Wh-What do I tell her?* she thought, racking her brain. *I'm going to spend most of the time observing Houghtow City...but if I tell her that, she's sure to be suspicious! Nonetheless, it is important that I inspect the College of Magic's new lower-grade classes, and I must pay a visit to give my thanks to the Fli-o'-Rys General Store for all of their assistance. I happen to have a good reason to prioritize Houghtow! I-It certainly isn't because I would like to see Garyl again...or speak with him...or...*

"What's the matter, my sister the Queen?"

"Wah!" the Maiden Queen exclaimed.

"Your face has gone red! Are you certain you don't have a fever?"

"I-I... No! Not at all!" The Queen hurriedly hid her face behind her hands. *Ahhh! Every time I think of Garyl, my face goes all red...*

Much to her chagrin, it was some time before her face returned to its original color. All she could do was hide behind her hands.

Chapter 2: The Maid who Fell from the Sky

◇Houghtow City—Fli-o'-Rys General Store◇

The world of Klyrode was situated in a vast plane of existence known as the Median Plane. The Median Plane was home to many other spherical worlds that drifted closer together and farther apart from time to time. And at its very center was a world whose energy was especially vast. This was the Celestial Plane, the world in charge of overseeing all other worlds in the Median.

In some worlds, the Celestial Plane was known by that very name. In others, it was known as Heaven. But everyone in every world was at least vaguely aware of its existence.

Hiya finished reading the book in their hands and looked over at Flio. “Exalted One, are you aware of the composition of this world?”

“I am,” Flio said. “I borrowed that book to study from a while ago.”

“Then forgive my presumptuousness, Exalted One, but there is something I must say.”

“Oh? What is it, Hiya?” Flio, who had been preparing to open the store for the day, stopped what he was doing and turned to face the djinn.

“It concerns the Celestial Plane,” Hiya said. “I have heard that the gods who reside there observe residents of other worlds that they deem to be a sufficient threat and sometimes even act to eliminate them.”

“Are you saying they consider me a threat?” Flio grimaced. “It’s true that I’ve gotten pretty good at magic since coming to this world, but I still have a lot to learn compared to you and Mister Ghozal. I know the two of you think very highly of me, but I’m really nothing special...”

“N-No, Exalted One. It is no mere flattery when I say that you are many leagues ahead of myself or Mister Ghozal. But that aside, I would like you to refrain from acting in such a way that will cause the gods to deem you a threat.”

“Acting in such a way that will cause them to deem me a threat...” Flio repeated. “Do I really know any spells that could threaten the gods?”

“You do!” Hiya said with rare forcefulness, stepping closer. It was rare for them to drop their soft-spoken demeanor.

Flio took a step back, staggered by Hiya’s sudden intensity. “W-Well, if you say so, Hiya, I believe you...” He nodded.

“Exalted One, do you remember when we faced each other as enemies?”

“Enemies?” Flio said. “Oh, you mean when you attacked us in the middle of the city.”

“Precisely. I attacked you with the spell Sever, but your wife protected you and was cut down in your place. Without a doubt, she suffered a mortal blow...” Hiya sighed. “Ahh... Recalling that day sickens me now. Why did I perform such a heinous act? Truly, I am worthy of nothing but death...”

They seemed to have somehow veered into self-hatred. They held their head in their hands and moaned pitifully. Then, Hiya reached for their own halo, moving to stab themselves in the throat.

“Hiya, wait!” Flio hastily extended his arm, conjuring a magic circle that appeared around Hiya’s hand, stopping it still. “I also went too far that day! I owe you an apology too!”

Their hand immobilized by Flio’s magic circle, Hiya seemed to return to themselves. “...Ah?! Wh-What was I—?!”

Flio breathed a sigh of relief. “Honestly...” he said. “You had me worried I’d need to use time magic again to bring you back to life!” Smirking, he lowered his hand.

“Precisely!” said Hiya.

“What?”

“Magic that controls the flow of time is the thing the Celestial Plane fears above all else. I beg of you... Please take care not to use your time magic again.” Hiya bowed very deep.

“O-Okay,” Flio said. Hiya wasn’t acting their usual self, after all. Flio’s

expression became serious. “I won’t use time magic again.”

◇The Celestial Plane—Central Management Tower◇

In the very center of the Celestial Plane was a great tower that rose high above the rest. This was the Central Management Tower, where the highest goddesses, elite even among the residents of that world, performed the bulk of their duties in observing, overseeing, and protecting the other worlds of the Median Plane, all to maintain order and balance.

The tower was partitioned into many sections, each used by various goddesses in their duties. In one such room, two goddesses in togas were looking between each other and the overseer crystal before them. Reflected in the crystal was an image of Hiya bowing before Flio.

“This man is the dangerous being you spoke of in the world of Klyrode, Celbua?” one of them asked.

“Yes, Lady Zofina. Please, observe.”

The goddess Celbua touched her hand to the crystal, and the image vanished, replaced by a new scene from the city streets. This was a recording of the day that Hiya and Flio had done battle. Hiya cast Sever. Rys ran between them and her husband, taking the blow for Flio and being cut cleanly in half. But then in the next second, a magical voice rang out: “*Reversing time.*” The scene returned to before Hiya had cast their spell. Rys’s body was unharmed.

“Is that...time magic?”

“Yes. The spell that man cast disrupted the temporal axis of Klyrode, nearly causing it to collide with another world.”

“I see...” Zofina folded her arms. “Then this is a grave matter for both the world of Klyrode and its nearby neighbors as well. It may even have an effect here on the Celestial Plane.”

“That’s not all,” Celbua said. “Look...” She touched the crystal again and the image changed, this time to a different place entirely—Flio’s battle with Speelion, a djinn from the Realm of Evil. Speelion struck Flio with a magic attack, and a second later Flio countered using the magic of the Realm of Evil himself, handily overpowering Speelion.

“So this man Flio learned the magic of the Realm of Evil, which is not present in Klyrode, simply from being exposed to the djinn’s magic...”

“So it seems. And now he has mastered every skill and every spell that exists not only in the world of Klyrode, but the Realm of Evil as well. In addition, by sheer coincidence, he is currently cohabiting with the Archmage of Midnight, from whom he mastered the dark arts.”

Zofina took a deep breath. “Why does this man have such great power? Certainly, the goddesses in the blessings department grant their blessings to those who are moved between worlds to ensure their survival at their destination. But I have never heard of such a person being granted the blessing of Transcendence, which is only held by very few, even on the Celestial Plane...”

“I thought it was strange as well,” said Celbua. “So I looked into the matter. It seems that the man named Flio received blessings meant for two.”

“Two?! H-How did something like that happen?!”

“It seems that when Flio was summoned from Paluma, his original world, to the world of Klyrode, another individual was caught up in the spell and transported to Paluma in his stead. This is only a theory, but perhaps the blessings meant for both those individuals were given to Flio alone by mistake. The two blessings fused within Flio, becoming something greater.”

“That does make sense, I suppose...” Zofina said, knitting her eyebrows. “Although it’s more likely in the case of fusion that one blessing would simply overwrite the other, or even become lower in rank. I suppose this Flio was simply lucky. But luck or not, the result was a man with an ability considered rare even among celestials.” She sighed. “But what of the other individual who didn’t receive a blessing? Won’t it be difficult for them, alone in another world with no special ability? Don’t tell me they died...”

“According to my follow-up investigation, the man in question was the manager of a store in his original world. In Paluma, he married a witch and is currently running a new store together with his wife.”

“I see,” Zofina smirked. “He must be quite the catch...”

“As long as he’s doing well, we can continue to simply observe him. But the

real problem is Flio.”

“Yes... If he uses his time magic again, it might disrupt the temporal axis not only of Klyrode but of the whole Median Plane...”

“Indeed. Perhaps we should send a disciple to keep an eye on him.”

“I agree. I will have one of my disciples dispatched immediately.”

“Very well,” Celbua said. “Thank you for your assistance.” Zofina nodded and left the room.

Zofina sighed deeply as she walked through the corridor. *Honestly... she thought. I wish the goddesses of the blessings department would do their jobs properly. It's a waste of time for management to be running around playing cleanup for them.*

“But that aside,” she said. “The world of Paluma has quite a number of delicious and delectable foods, if I recall. It's been a while since I've snuck off somewhere. Perhaps it will help me clear my mind...” Zofina rounded a corner and disappeared from sight.

◇Houghtow City—In the Sky◇

It was a beautiful day in Houghtow City. And in the sky, above the clouds, there was a woman wearing a maid outfit, complete with an apron, with a great pair of wings growing from her back. She was clearly not an ordinary human.

“What is Lady Celbua thinking...?” she said to nobody in particular. “Sending me, Tanyalite, her most capable disciple, on an observation mission of all things! This sort of work is meant for novices! If it hadn't been a request from the goddess herself, I would have refused and cut communications on the spot! I really, truly, from the bottom of my heart don't want to be here...”

Tanyalite sighed deeply and turned her gaze down towards Houghtow City, which looked tiny so far beneath her. Her field of vision zoomed in further and further, and in no time, it focused on a particular house. “Mm-hmm...” she said, bored. “So that's where this troublemaker of ours lives. Flio, was it? I suppose I should use my Mind Manipulation spell to infiltrate their house as a member of their— Huh?!”

Her eyes went wide. The man she was watching, who she supposed must be Flio, looked straight up—right at where she was in the clouds. His eyes met hers. “I-Impossible!” she said. “I’m above the clouds! I should be too high up for him to see! And furthermore, I’ve cast the spell Void Presence on myself! How could someone on the surface look me straight in the eyes?!”

She tore her gaze away, blinking her eyes rapidly. She swallowed. And then, after steeling herself, she turned her gaze back towards Flio. But all she could see was pure white.

“Wh-What is this?” Troubled, she returned her eyes to their usual magnification, when...

“Skreeeeeeeeee!” an ear-piercing shriek filled the sky.

“...What?” Tanyalite said.

Next, she heard the voice of a young girl. “Big sis Wyne, you’re so fast!”

“Ah ha ha!” the first voice laughed. “Come on, Eli-Eli! Come on! More, more! Faster, faster! Let’s go higher and higher!”

Suddenly, something flying upwards at tremendous speeds struck Tanyalite square on the jaw. It was a girl.

“Fgwah?!”

“Eeeeeek!!!”



Tanyalite and the girl, Wyne, both cried out at once.

“B-Big sis Wyne!” Another girl—this one was Elinàsze—flew up at an alarming speed herself.

The two had been flying upwards as fast as they could as practice for Elinàsze’s flight magic when they ran into Tanyalite. Wyne was very aware of her surroundings and could detect the presence of magic beasts in the sky from a great distance away, but Tanyalite had been concealing her presence with magic and had gone unnoticed. The impact knocked both Wyne and Tanyalite unconscious. They began to fall earthwards.

“Oh, no! I have to save big sis Wyne and that strange lady!” Elinàsze dove after them as fast as she could, but she still wasn’t used to flying. The pair accelerated out of her reach.

◇A While Earlier◇

“Papa, look!” Elinàsze cried happily. Her body was floating in midair. “I can cast Fly now!”

Flio gave his daughter a great big smile.

Garyl looked up at her enviously. “Whoa! That’s amazing, sis! I can’t do that at all!”

“Hee hee!” Elinàsze giggled, smiling kindly down at her younger brother. “I’m sure you can do it too, Garyl! You just have to practice!”

“Yeah?” Garyl grinned, pumping his fists. “Then I’m gonna ask Mister Ghozal to help me with my magic!”

“Garyl...” Flio said, smiling wryly, “I can teach you how to use magic, you know.”

“I wanna learn your magic too, dad!” Garyl said. “But first, I wanna learn all of *Ghozal’s* spells! Ghozal’s spells are like...*kablam! Kapow!* They’re super awesome!” He waved his arms all around, rhapsodizing about the magic Ghozal had shown him the other day. His eyes were practically shining.

Ghozal had recently begun training Garyl. They had started with fistfighting, but by now, Ghozal had taught him how to use a sword and a spear as well, and

had even begun teaching the boy combat magic.

Ah, yes, Flio thought. Garyl is most interested in magic for the flair. I suppose I can leave this to Mister Ghozal. Although I can cast all of those spells as well...

Flio kept smiling despite his complicated emotions as Elinàsze lazily drifted closer. “I want papa to teach me!” she said. “I want to learn more and more!” She smiled happily.

“Ah,” Flio said, breathing a sigh of relief. “If you’re happy with me, I’ll be glad to teach you more.”

Unlike Garyl, Elinàsze had been learning magic from Flio. Sometimes Hiya or Damalynas, who specialized in magic, would give her lessons as well, but if Flio was home, he always accompanied them.

Flio smiled one of his easygoing smiles while Elinàsze floated on, beaming widely. *Hee hee!* she thought. *I made papa happy! Making papa happy makes me happy! I love my papa!*

Elinàsze was a consummate daddy’s girl.

As Elinàsze and Flio beamed at each other, Wyne came running out from the front entrance right up to them. “Wow, Eli-Eli! You’re flying! You’re flying!” she cried happily. “Hey, we should race! Let’s see who can make it to the top of the clouds first!”

She crossed her arms in front of her and then spread them wide. As she did, a pair of dragon wings manifested on her back. The dress she wore was handmade and designed with a large opening on the back so that her wings could appear without ripping the fabric. Thanks to Wyne’s long, voluminous hair, even a large enough gap to fit her wings through wasn’t particularly noticeable most of the time.

Wyne beat her wings and ascended into the sky. She petted Elinàsze on the head, and with a cry of “Ready...go!” she took off at top speed straight upwards.

“All right!” Elinàsze cried, chasing after her with her magic. “I won’t lose to you, big sis Wyne!” Elinàsze hadn’t had time to master her Fly spell, but she nonetheless was quite fast as she flew after Wyne.

“Jeez!” Garyl said. “Big sis Wyne and big sis Elinàsze are amazing! I just can’t seem to wrap my head around flight magic...”

“You’re very talented yourself, Garyl,” Flio reassured him. “If you do your best, I’m sure you’ll be able to fly with them someday.”

“You think so?” Garyl grinned and nodded. “I guess I gotta do my best, then!”

Flio patted Garyl on the head and looked up at his two daughters. “Wyne’s holding back,” he said, “but it’s incredible that Elinàsze can fly so well right after learning the magic.”

In the blink of an eye, the two were already far enough away that they looked like tiny specks, so Flio cast the spell Magnify. Suddenly, he could see the two clearly, as if they were right in front of his eyes. Only... “Hm?” Flio creased his eyebrows. *That Wyne... She didn’t wear her underwear again.* The dress Rys had made for her was fairly loose-fitting. When viewed from behind, it was quite obvious that she was wearing nothing at all underneath.

“I understand not wearing a bra, since it gets in the way of her wings...” Flio grumbled, careful not to look up her skirt. “But I’ve told her over and over again to make sure she’s wearing something underneath! She’ll take off the dress in a second too, if you give her the opportunity... I really need to speak with her again about it. She’s a girl, after all...”

Wyne had once been the strongest fighter of the Dark Army’s legendary legion of dragons. She was very young and still thought like a child, but her battle power was easily on par with the Infernal Four. For that reason, she and the rest of the dragons were treated as a special unit. But Flio adopted Wyne, and now she lived as part of his family. That was why she called Flio “dada” and his wife Rys “mama.” She wasn’t related to them by blood, but they doted on her just the same. And when Garyl and Elinàsze were born, she doted on them as her adorable little siblings.

It was obvious that if Wyne had been flying all out, she could have easily left Elinàsze in the dust. But she was good at controlling her speed and was careful to ascend about as fast as her sister, the two laughing together as they rose high in the sky.

Flio smiled as he watched. But then he noticed something higher up in the

sky. “Hm?” he said. “Is there someone else flying above them...?” He couldn’t see them, but he could sense a presence. He raised his arm and began casting spells and invoking skills: Detect Concealment. Identification. True Sight. Thousand Eyes. Before long, he could see a woman flying in the sky.

His eyes went wide. “A woman...wearing a maid uniform?” he said. “She has wings, I see...but what is she doing so high up in the sky?!”

He looked closer and saw that the woman was looking down at him with an expression just as shocked as his. The two stared at each other from far away, Flio on the ground and the maid in the sky. And then, a second later, Wyne, who had been flying upwards incredibly fast, rammed straight into her, hitting her square on the jaw.

The maid had been concealing both her form and her presence with magic. Wyne must have had no idea she was there. Otherwise, she would have at least decelerated. And as a dragonewt, Wyne’s head was quite tough.

“Fgwah?!” the maid shouted. The impact must have knocked her unconscious—she was plummeting towards the ground.

Wyne didn’t get out much better. She hadn’t been ready for such a strong impact to her skull. “Eeeeeek!!!” she screamed, losing consciousness herself. And both she and the maid tumbled downwards.

◇And Now...◇

The two girls plummeted from the sky—Wyne and Tanyalite, the angel in a maid outfit. Elinàsze flew after them as fast as she could, but given her inexperience with flight magic, she couldn’t seem to gain any ground.

“Elinàsze’s flying as best as she can...” Flio observed. “But she’s not gonna make it in time.” He held out his arm and chanted a spell. A magic circle appeared in front of his hand and slowly began to rotate. “Mh!” Flio exhaled, and the circle shone brightly. Tanyalite and Wyne both stopped their descent and hung silently in midair.

Gravity magic was one of Flio’s specialties. He would typically use it to pin magic beasts or other foes to the ground. He could crush them flat too, if the situation demanded it. In this case, however, he was using the spell Antigravity

to stop Tanyalite and Wyne from falling to their deaths.

He sighed with relief. “Looks like it worked.” Carefully managing the force of his Antigravity spell, he gently lowered the two to the ground.

“Wow, dad...” Garyl gasped. He seemed deeply impressed with his father as he watched him guide the two down from the sky.

“Would you mind catching Wyne for me, Garyl?” Flio asked. “I’ll take care of the new woman in the maid outfit.”

“Okay, got it!” Garyl did as he was told and ran underneath Wyne. Flio, meanwhile, took his position beneath Tanyalite. The two fell out of the air, poised to land flat on their backs, but they were caught safely by Flio and Garyl.

“Nnnh...” Wyne mumbled in her sleep. “Meat...” She wrapped her arms around Garyl’s shoulders and took a big chomp of his cheek.

“H-Hey!” Garyl cried. “That’s my cheek, Wyne! It isn’t for eating!”

“Nom, nom... So soft and nice... Nom, nom, nom...”

“S-Stop!” Garyl screamed. “I told you not to eat me!!!” But Wyne showed no signs of stopping. “Big sis Wyne... Stooooop...”

Elinàsze smirked knowingly at the scene as she landed next to her father. “Honestly,” she said. “What a troublesome child.”

Flio wore a smirk identical to his daughter’s. He watched Garyl and Wyne carry on their shoving match for a bit before turning his attention back towards the woman in his arms. “But who *is* this woman, I wonder...” he said. “She can use some pretty impressive magic; she was pretty high up in the sky, after all. But I don’t *think* she’s an avian demihuman...”

Tanyalite gave no answer—she was fast unconscious.



Flio carried Tanyalite to the guest bedroom and laid her down to rest. Ghozal, Uliminas, and Hiya were there, listening to him explain the situation.

“...And that about covers it!” Flio finished, turning his eyes back towards the still-unconscious Tanyalite.

Ghozal looked at the girl and folded his arms. "Hrm. I couldn't sense her presence at all. I don't think I've ever seen someone who can hide it so well. What about you, Uliminas?" He glanced at the hellcat standing next to him.

Uliminas folded her arms as well and cocked her head, puzzled. "Mew..." She sighed. "I'm purretty good at seeing through spells like Void Purresence..." she said. "But I couldn't sense her at all either..."

"Indeed..." Hiya said, looking over at Ghozal and Uliminas. "Even Mister Ghozal, the strongest Dark One in history, and his confederate and head of intelligence, Miss Uliminas, were unable to detect her, such is her skill at concealment. And yet the Exalted One could see through her magic easily. Truly, he is the one worthy of my eternal loyalty." Facing Flio, they knelt and bowed their head.

Flustered, Flio placed his hands on Hiya's shoulders. "N-No! It's just...you know. Ghozal and Uliminas were inside getting ready for work! Of course they didn't notice her. If they had been outside with me, it would have been a different story. I really wish you wouldn't keep blowing everything out of proportion, Hiya..." With a sheepish smile, he pulled Hiya to their feet.

Just then, the door to the room opened, and Rys stepped inside. "Wyne is awake, my lord husband," she said. "She's with Garyl and Elinàsze."

"I see. Thank goodness." Flio breathed a sigh of relief. "I healed the lump on her head with magic, but I was worried when she didn't come to right away..."

"There's nothing to worry about. That big lump healed without even leaving a trace. The moment Wyne opened her eyes, she looked around and said, 'Where'd the meat go?'" Rys giggled. "Garyl's cheek must have been quite nice to chew on!"

"Ah ha ha," Flio laughed. "Poor Garyl! But I'm glad she's okay."

"Hrm..." Ghozal said as Flio and Rys carried on their happy conversation. "Perhaps this woman will be opening her eyes soon as well..."

"Maybe!" said Uliminas. "Flio healed her jaw with his meowgic, and she doesn't seem to have any other injuries."

Flio turned back to look at Tanyalite on the bed. This time, he noticed

something. “Hm?” Her jaw was glowing with a faint green light. *That’s right around where she broke her jaw...* Flio thought. *I thought I had already healed it...* He reached out and touched Tanyalite’s glowing jaw.

Suddenly, a window appeared:

All Celestial Magic and Skills Mastered

C-Celestial?! Flio’s eyes went wide. Like the Celestial Plane from the book Hiya was reading?! Let me think... And so he did. Because of my blessing, if I come into contact with a spell, I learn not just that spell, but all of the spells from the world it was from. Or at least, that’s what Mister Ghozal and Hiya told me. So that green light was a spell from the Celestial Plane? Why would this woman be affected by magic like that?!

Flio had guessed right. That spell was Regeneration, a type of magic used in the Celestial Plane. Flio’s spell had healed Tanyalite’s wound, but not completely. All goddesses and their disciples had this spell active at all times in case they were ever injured. Over time, it would automatically heal any damage that was sustained. The light enveloping Tanyalite’s jaw was proof that the magic was taking effect, healing the lingering effects of the blow. And now that Flio had touched it, his ability Epiphany taught him every spell and skill available on the Celestial Plane—an ability only held by those who had the blessing of Transcendence.

Flio, who had never in his wildest dreams expected that to happen, stared at the window with a troubled look on his face.

“Mew know...” Uliminas said, shocking him out of his thoughts. “We’ve still gotta get to work...”

Flio closed the window and turned around. “Already?”

“Hrm,” said Ghozal. “If we want to open the store with Greanyl’s group, Balirossa, and the rest who went ahead, we should get going ourselves.”

“I suppose,” Flio said. “But details aside, I don’t want to just leave this woman alone. It’s sort of our fault she got injured...” He looked over at Tanyalite, who was sleeping soundly on the bed, still plainly troubled.

Rys stepped up to her husband’s side. “There’s nothing to worry about, my

lord husband,” she said. “I will stay here and look after her.”

“But Rys,” Flio protested. “You already have so much work you need to do around the house...”

“I told you—there’s nothing to worry about!” Rys said, smiling cheerfully. “I can look after her while doing my chores!”

“If I may be so bold,” Hiya said, “perhaps I can remain here and help so that the Exalted One can see to his tasks at the Fli-o’-Rys General Store without worry. I shall have my beloved training partner Damalynas assist at the store in my stead.”

“R-Really?” Flio said. “Well, if you’re here too, Hiya...”

“Yes, yes,” said Rys, smiling happily as she physically pushed Flio out of the room. “And now that that’s settled, you all should hurry up and get to work!”

“O-Okay!” said Flio. “Look after her while we’re gone! I’m counting on both of you!”

“Thank you for your trust, Exalted One. Your humble servant Hiya will do everything in their power to assist your wife in her tasks.” Hiya bowed deeply to Flio as he was forced from the room.

Sped along by his wife, Flio cast Teleportation, conjuring a portal—by all appearances an ordinary door. On the other side was the Fli-o’-Rys General Store. Rys saw the three off with a smile as the portal vanished.

“Now then,” Rys said. “Time to get on with my housework—while looking after this woman, of course!” She looked over at the bed where Tanyalite had been lying, and then her eyes went wide. “Oh...?” Tanyalite was awake, sitting upright in bed, staring straight ahead at the wall with a blank expression on her face. “Um, are you awake?”

Tanyalite slowly turned her head to look over at Rys. “Excuse me,” she said. “Might I ask your name?”

“Of course!” Rys answered her. “I am Rys, the wife of Lord Flio!”

“Lord Flio...” Tanyalite echoed back. “Lord Flio...”

“Um...” Rys peered at the troubled expression on Tanyalite’s face. “Is

something the matter?”

“Perhaps, O wife of the Exalted One,” Hiya said, “this woman has suffered temporary memory loss from her impact with Mistress Wyne.”

“Goodness, how dreadful! But what is one supposed to do about something like this? Should we try hitting her on the back of her head?” Rys cocked a punch, only for her attack to be stopped by Hiya’s magic.



“W-Wait, O wife of the Exalted One! Such an action might simply cause her to lose memory again! We don’t want to exacerbate her condition!”

“Ah, I suppose you’re right,” Rys said. “I wouldn’t want to do anything dangerous. Then I suppose I’ll simply kick her in the back...” So saying, Rys lifted up her leg, preparing to bring her heel down on her patient.

“W-Wife of the Exalted One!” Hiya stopped her kick just as they had stopped her punch before. “That too would be quite dangerous! Your humble servant begs of you, please! Calm yourself!” A bead of sweat formed on Hiya’s brow as they focused their power on restraining Rys.

Meanwhile, Tanyalite, who had been muttering to herself, finally spoke up. “That’s it! I remember!” she said, and she sprung to her feet.

“Oh!” said Rys. “Your memory is back?”

“Yes!” Tanyalite said. “And thank you for your assistance. I am...”

◇Houghtow City—Fli-o’-Rys General Store◇

It had been an entire month since Tanyalite and Wyne’s midair collision.

“Excuse me, Mister Flio?” said a customer, getting Flio’s attention. “About this item...”

“Ah!” said Flio, who was in the middle of a conversation with another customer. “C-Could you excuse me for just a moment, please?”

Fli-o’-Rys was busy with customers every day, and today was no exception. As always, Flio was the center of attention.

“Excuse me, sir,” an apron-clad Rys said, running up. “Perhaps I can assist you with that?”

“Ah, the owner’s wife! Thank you!” The customer turned from Flio to show the item he was holding to Rys. “I was wondering if you had something like this, but with a shorter, heftier blade.”

“I believe I have just the thing!” Rys said. “Wait here for just a moment.” Rys gave the customer a smile and ran off towards the storeroom behind the register.

The Fli-o'-Rys General Store was as busy as ever, but with Rys assisting customers on the shop floor, the queue was moving much faster. It no longer extended all the way outside the shop.

Thank the gods for Tanya, Flio thought as he watched Rys go.

◇Meanwhile—Flio's House◇

"I suppose I had best get started..." Tanyalite sighed as she stepped over the threshold of the living room, a mop in one hand and a broom in the other. And then she dashed forward, cleaning the room faster than the eye could see. In no time at all, the ceiling was scrubbed clean, the table polished, the magic lanterns sparkling, and the floor pristine. Rys had been fast, but Tanyalite was even faster. In the blink of an eye, the living room was set in order. The last thing on the agenda was a fresh layer of straw for Sybe's pen.

"Now, let's move to the next room." Tanyalite dashed up the stairs. As she went, she scrubbed all the walls and all the ceilings along the staircase clean. On the second floor, she started with the hallway, cleaning the floors and the walls in order. Then, she went inside everyone's individual rooms to see to the cleaning there as well. The third floor she finished in much the same manner as the second.

"And now to air out the mattresses!" Tanyalite returned the mop and broom to her own room and picked up her mattress, leaping out the window with it. "Hup!" Despite the height of the fall, she landed easily and hung the mattress up on a rack she had prepared.

With that done, Tanyalite leapt up with a "Hah!" She landed back on the third story of Flio's house, coming in through the same window she had just vacated. Her own window closed, and without any noticeable delay at all, she flung open the next one over. "Hup!" Tanyalite leapt from the second window, carrying a second mattress. She hung it up on the drying rack and jumped back inside. Then, she moved on to the next room.

Once she had finished gathering the mattresses on the third floor, Tanyalite gave the second-story bedrooms the same treatment.

Down on the ranch, Byleri was watching in awe of Tanyalite's handiwork as she brought the horses their hay. "Like, wow..." she said. "Miss Tanya's like,

totally amazing...”

The instant she let those words slip from her mouth, the demon horses stopped what they were doing and all ran up behind her at once. These were Sleip’s former subordinates—demon horses who could assume human form.

“Boss! You shouldn’t even think of such things!” one of the horses said.

“Only Miss Tanya can do that!” said another.

“Please, don’t do anything that will give Lord Sleip cause to worry about you!” They were all quite desperate to convince Byleri not to act on whatever she was thinking about.

“Aww...” Byleri said. “But like, I wonder... Maybe I could do it if I, like, tried really hard?”

“No! You mustn’t!”

“We’re begging you! Please! No!”

“You’ll give Lord Sleip a heart attack!”

“But...” Byleri protested.

“No buts!”

“You seriously mustn’t!”

“Please, think of Lord Sleip!”

By now, Tanyalite had finished hanging up all the mattresses and was currently running off towards the bath she was using to launder the sheets.

“And now, the laundry!”

A month prior, Rys and Hiya had exchanged glances as Tanyalite recovered her memories. “I am Tanyalite,” she said. “You may refer to me as ‘Tanya’ if my full name is difficult to say. I have been sent here to serve as Lord Flio’s maid.”

Tanya’s mission, of course, was to infiltrate Flio’s house and watch him to make sure he didn’t use any dangerous magic. But after her shocking impact with Wyne and her subsequent memory loss, she had gotten it confused in her head, and now thought her mission was to serve as Flio’s maid.

Hiya had been suspicious at first. “That woman... Could she perhaps be a disciple of the gods of the Celestial Plane, come here to observe the Exalted One?” But Tanyalite’s innocence was undeniable. After a week, Hiya had come around, even going so far as to speak her praises.

“Tanya does excellent work for the Exalted One,” they said. “I must improve as well if I am not to lose to her.”

◇Celestial Plane—Central Management Tower◇

In a room in the Central Management Tower, high above the Celestial Plane, two goddesses glanced between each other and the image reflected in the observation crystal.

“It seems that Tanyalite has succeeded in infiltrating Flio’s household.”

“Indeed, Lady Zofina. Anyone who saw her work would think her to be nothing more than a loyal maid. Even the djinn who commands the origin of light and darkness, who was suspicious of her initially, has been taken in by her performance.”

“Yes,” said Zofina. “As long as she can keep it up, the observation should proceed without any issues.” She and Celbua nodded. But then...

“Hm?” both said at once. Tanyalite’s image in the crystal looked straight up at them. Still carrying the basket full of laundry under one of her arms, she raised the other, and... *Bwooon...* The crystal went dark.

“What?!” Zofina exclaimed. “What is going on, Celbua?!”

“I-I have no idea! This has never happened before!” The two kept pouring magic energy into the crystal, but no matter what they did, they couldn’t get it to turn back on.

◇Houghtow City—In Front of Flio’s House◇

Laundry under her arm, Tanyalite looked up at the sky, holding her arm out in front of her. “I haven’t the faintest idea who was trying to spy on Lord Flio’s house...” she said. “But I, Tanya, will not permit it!” Gradually, she lowered her arm. “Oh, no! I’ve been wasting time! I must hurry and hang the laundry up to dry! And when that’s finished, I must go hunting for tonight’s dinner...”

She ran off towards the drying racks, as busy as always.

◇That Evening—Fli-o'-Rys General Store◇

Rys took off her apron. “Now,” she said. “I believe it is time for me to go home and prepare dinner. Tanya should have the ingredients ready for me by now.”

“Thank you, Rys,” said Flio. “You were a big help as always.”

Rys smiled happily. “I know of no greater joy than to be of use to my lord husband,” she said.

“About that portal, then...” Flio started.

“Oh, there’s no need! I can run home on my own from here quite easily!” Still beaming, Rys bolted out the door, weaving between the customers in the shop while running at top speed for the city streets. She was so fast that the customers didn’t even notice her passing.

Flio smirked as he watched. *It’s incredible how fast she can run...*

Flio’s house was outside of the Houghtow City gates. For that reason, they had to pass through the checkpoint in order to reach their home. By now, the gate guards recognized the members of Flio’s household on sight.

“Keep up the good work, men,” Rys said.

“You too, Missus,” the gate guard said, waving her through. “Have a pleasant evening.”

There was a group of nearly ten guards gathered outside the gate.

“Hm?” one said, cocking his head in confusion.

“What’s wrong?” asked another. “Did something happen?”

“No...” said the first. “I just thought I heard a voice.”

“A voice?”

“Yeah... A woman’s voice saying, ‘Keep up the good work...’”

“Well, I don’t see a woman here!” The guards looked around and laughed. Indeed, there were no women anywhere nearby—not even a child.

Of course, the voice had been Rys's. The guards recognized her on sight, of course, but she was hardly going to omit the pleasantries. She had been zooming along home when she thought, *I'm trying to teach Garyl and Elinàsze the importance of a proper greeting! I should greet these men properly myself!* So she stopped for just a second, told the guard at the checkpoint to keep up the good work, and zoomed off. She had been standing still for so little time and moving so fast that the guards outside never even noticed her there.

I hope they don't start any more rumors about strange voices... Flio thought, smirking wryly to himself.

Up walked Ghozal. "We've handed over the last of the shipments to Greanyl, Mister Flio."

"Oh, Mister Ghozal!" Flio said. "Thank you for your help!"

"Not at all! I should be thanking you!" Ghozal grinned and smacked Flio on the shoulder. "You're the one who found our Silent Listeners jobs when they didn't have anywhere else to go after leaving the Dark Army!"

Flio smiled one of his usual easygoing smiles. "Well, thanks to Greanyl and the rest of her team, we can do business all over the land! I'm every bit as grateful to them."

"Then I suppose the feeling is mutual," said Ghozal.

"Yes! That's my hope, anyway." Flio and Ghozal smiled at each other.

"By the way..." Ghozal said. "That Tanya lady who's been helping out at the house lately... Do you have any idea who could've sent her?"

Tanyalite had told them herself that she was sent to be Flio's maid. But by whom? When Flio had asked, she had said that it "wasn't important" and refused to give any better of an answer. But she worked hard, and the members of the household had gradually let their guards down towards her. But Ghozal had never let go of the question of where she'd come from.

"Well," Flio said. "I've looked into it a bit. Nobody in Klyrode Castle or the Dark Army seems to have heard of her..."

Ghozal folded his arms and lowered his voice so that the customers in the shop couldn't hear. "Hrm. Between Uliminas and myself, we know pretty much everything about demons. I can't imagine we'd have simply never heard of someone so powerful..."

"That's true," Flio said, still smiling. "But, well, we've looked into the matter a bit. Perhaps we should leave it there? Tanya's proved herself to be an invaluable member of the household this past month."

"I can't deny that..." Ghozal said. "Well, all right. If that's what you think, Mister Flio, then that's what we'll do." He smacked Flio on the shoulder again and headed off to the storeroom to get it in order.

That's Mister Flio for you, Ghozal thought. If he's decided he believes in someone, he'll believe in them until the end. He even treats a former Dark One like me as his best friend... Ghozal couldn't keep from grinning as he walked.

Flio watched Ghozal go and turned back to look at the rest of the store. "Okay!" he said. "It's almost time to close. I can do this."

◇Near Houghtow City—The Highway◇

After receiving the merchandise for shipment from Ghozal, Greanyl departed from the store ahead of the rest. She passed through the city gates and continued down the highway in her horse-drawn wagon.

Greanyl looked puzzled as she sat in the driver's seat. "I thought Boundicca was pulling my cart today," she said. "I didn't expect to see you, Lord Dalc Horst."

"O-Oh..." Dalc Horst said, pulling the wagon in his horse form. "Boundicca isn't feeling well today. I'm her replacement."

That only seemed to confuse Greanyl more. "That's strange," she said. "I didn't hear anything about Boundicca being ill..."

"A-Ah!" Dalc Horst hastily explained. "I-It came on quite suddenly, you see! She fell ill all at once! B-But more importantly, I'll take you on to Sojieya, so you can get some rest if it pleases you..."

"No, no," said Greanyl. "I would never sleep and leave you to pull the cart by

yourself! Besides, I'm a shadow demon. I can go for an entire week without sleep if need be."

"Yes..." said Dalc Horst. "Yes, I suppose that's true..."

"Hm?" Greanyl cocked her head, looking over Dalc Horst. *How peculiar... Lord Dalc Horst is usually so well-spoken. What has got him so flustered and incoherent? Don't tell me he was worried that I'd get bored on the road! Us shadow demons can go an entire month without speaking a word if need be...*

Indeed, Dalc Horst tried several more times to start a conversation with Greanyl. But each time, she would only give the briefest possible response. And the wagon continued down the highway...

◇Houghtow City—Flio's House◇

It was night. The Fli-o'-Rys General Store had closed up shop for the day, and Flio and his companions had returned to the house to enjoy dinner together as always. Lately, the conversations had generally started with Garyl and Elinàsze talking about their day at school. Afterwards, everyone would carry on talking about whatever they pleased. It was an indispensable period of recovery for the whole household.

After dinner, everyone took their turns bathing. The baths at Flio's house were divided into men's and women's baths. And now that Flio and Rys had kids, Ghozal had married Uliminas and Balirossa, and Sleip and Byleri were a well-known couple, Flio had built a larger bath for families to use together regardless of gender. Flio's family took the first bath, then Ghozal's family, and then Sleip and Byleri. Meanwhile, for those who were bathing alone, they went in this order: Blossom, then Belano, and finally Tanyalite.

The baths, incidentally, were furnished with a water elemental magic gem of Flio's creation that produced hot water twenty-four hours a day, as well as magic gems enchanted to alleviate physical and mental fatigue and to restore magic power. In total, there were more than twenty magic gems providing all sorts of beneficial effects. That was why Ghozal, Uliminas, and Balirossa visited so often for a second bath late in the night after their nightly activities, and Hiya and Damalynas came to take a soak at erratic times whenever they pleased.

"I suppose it's time for us to take our bath, then," Flio said, leading his family

onward to the bath.

“Yay! Bath! Bath!” Wyne cheered, tackle-hugging Flio with a great big smile on her face. “Big bath with everyone!”

“I, too, love taking baths with my family!” rhapsodized Elinàsze, smiling happily as she held Flio’s hand.

“Yeah!” said Garyl, following along behind, smiling just as happily as his sister. “Together’s the best way to bathe!”

Rys regarded her family with a fond smile. “I’m so happy that we can bathe together like this.” She drew close to whisper in Flio’s ear. “By the way, my lord husband...is there any news concerning *you-know-what?*”

“Ahh,” Flio said, smirking knowingly at the words. “*That*. I’m still looking into it, but it’s proving to be quite difficult...”

Rys folded her arms. “I see...” she muttered to herself. “It’s difficult to recreate the water from the fertility bath, even with my lord husband’s magic... I suppose it must simply have to do with the land itself...”

Flio, meanwhile, was bright red. *The water composition isn’t that far off from the fertility bath, actually... he thought. It probably wouldn’t take that much more effort to get it right. But...our children use this bath too! What am I thinking?!*

The family of five took off their clothes in the changing area and got in the bath. This area had originally been split off into a men’s and women’s bath, but now it was a single bath as big as a swimming pool, easily large enough to fit all of them.

Wyne was the first to dart for the bath. “Yay! Bath! Bath! I call dibs!”

Garyl was right behind. “You’re not beating me this time, big sis!” he said.

“Garyl! Big sis Wyne!” Elinàsze said, hot on their tails. “Wait! You’re supposed to rinse yourself off before getting in the tub!”

“Oh, right! That’s right!”

“Oops! Sorry...”

The two stopped, turned on the spot, and headed for the rinsing area, but their race wasn't exactly over.

"All right, Gare-Gare! Last one there's a rotten egg!"

"I'm gonna beat you, big sis Wyne!"

"Honestly..." Elinàsze said as she watched the two run off. "Big sis Wyne always wants to race. And Garyl takes her up on it every time..." But as long as they were rinsing themselves off, there was nothing more to be said.

Flio watched his children's antics with his usual easygoing smile. "Now then. Shall we rinse ourselves off and get in the bath as well?"

"Yes, my lord husband." He and Rys sat down on two stools in the rinsing area.

"Shall I wash your back?"

"Oh, that's all right, Rys," Flio said. "I can do that much on my own."

"My lord husband..." Rys said. "I wasn't the one who said that..."

"What? Then who...?!" Flio and Rys's eyes met, and then they turned in sync to look behind them.

There was Tanyalite, wearing naught but a bath towel. She had a washcloth in her hand, as if she were poised to start washing Flio's back at any second.

"T-Tanya?!" Flio said, hastily hiding his groin from sight. "Wh-Wh-What are you doing in here?!"

"Yes, Master," Tanya said. "According to the *Maid's Handbook* I obtained the other day, a proper housemaid is not to be averse to the duty of washing her master's body. I thought I should put those words into practice as soon as possible. Have I done something to offend?"

"You haven't *offended* me..." Flio said. "But Tanya... This house is like a big family. You don't need to act like you're waiting on some nobleman."

"Thank you, Tanya!" Rys said as she hastily removed the maid from the bath. "I believe we'll refrain for the time being!"

Wyne smiled happily at Tanya. "Awww!" she said. "But she's already here! I

wanna get in the bath with Tan-Tan! I wanna!”

“Truly, Young Mistress?” said Tanya.

“That seems like a separate matter entirely...”

“I don’t mind Tanya being here!” Garyl volunteered.

“You too, Young Master?” Tanya replied.

“None of that matters in the slightest!” Rys shouted. “My lord husband is in here!”

The bath was plunged into chaos. At some point, Flio succeeded in hiding his crotch with a towel. “How ’bout this,” he said. “I’ll get out first, and the rest of you can spend some time bathing with Tanya.”

Flio chanted a short spell and vanished from sight.

“Ah...” Tanya reached out, dumbfounded. “Master...”

Wyne grabbed her from behind. “Bath! Bath! I wanna get in the bath with Tan-Tan!”

“N-No!” Tanya protested as Wyne dragged her by the arm towards the hot water. “I’m here to wash my Master’s back! Where— Aah!!!” Pulling Tanya along, Wyne dove straight into the bath. *To think the Young Mistress would do something so brash!* Tanya thought, eyes wide open in astonishment as she sank into the tub. *Although I suppose she often behaves in altogether unexpected ways...* Wyne, for her part, was grinning happily. Tanya couldn’t help but grin back. *The unexpected can be fun sometimes...*

On the Celestial Plane, Tanya was known as the Iron-Mask Angel, for it was said that she was never seen to so much as smile.

◇Blossom Acres—Goblin Shack◇

Blossom Acres was the large farm managed by Blossom outside of Flio’s house. In one corner there stood a shack, built for the goblins who worked on the farm. There was Maunty, with his wife and children, and Hokh’hokton, who was still single and had his own separate room.

“Hmm?” Hokh’hokton said, dumbfounded. “If it isn’t Lord Flio! A-And half-

naked, I see! What brings you to my room at this late hour?"

Indeed, Flio was standing before him wearing nothing but a towel to hide his shame.

When Tanyalite's arrival turned the bath into a scene of chaos, Flio had meant to teleport to his room to regain control over the situation. But because he was in a rush, he'd made a mistake and ended up in Hokh'hokton's room instead.

"Ah!" Flio said, blushing furiously. "I-I'm terribly sorry, Hokh'hokton! I'm leaving! Aha ha..." He chanted a short spell again and was gone.

"N-Now what could that have been about, I wonder?" Hokh'hokton folded his arms and muttered to himself. "Don't tell me Lord Flio has taken a...*sexual interest* in me?! B-But even so, I really do prefer women..."

Outside, the moon shone brightly.

◇A Backstreet Somewhere◇

On a backstreet in a city somewhere far from Klyrode Castle, there was a great tower made of stone. In one dimly lit room, a very plump elderly man sat in an extravagant armchair. "Zanzibar's rebellion lost?" he said.

The woman he was addressing yipped as she approached him. "So it seems." She had on a golden cheongsam with a slit cut all the way up to the waist. "He thought he'd have an easy time of it with the Dark One Yuigarde missing, but then the Wolf of Justice showed up and turned everything topsy-turvy..."

Another woman stepped out of the darkness, wearing a silver cheongsam of the same cut. She stepped up to the man's other side. This was the Shadow King, the former King of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode, and these women—the demon fox sisters Kintsuno the Gold and Gintsuno the Silver, who had once been vassals of the Dark One—were his minions.

The Shadow King had been developing his black-market organization even when he was the reigning monarch, while the demon fox sisters spent their time serving the Dark One plundering and doing crooked business. But when the Shadow King's illicit dealings were brought to light, he was forced to abdicate the throne, while the demon fox sisters were ousted from power when they failed in their attempt to seize the throne during the chaos of Yuigarde's

ascension. The three were old acquaintances from their time in the black market and joined forces upon their respective expulsions. This tower was one of the secret bases of their organization.

Gintsuno's eyes lit up as she stood next to the Shadow King. "It took a bit of digging to find this out," she said, smirking. "But it seems that the price of the Wolf of Justice's assistance was for the Dark Regent Calsi'im to sign a peace treaty with the Klyrode army."

"Well, no matter," the Shadow King said. "We made a tidy sum off Zanzibar as it is. This works out well for us."

"Indeed!" yipped Kintsuno. "And we helped ourselves to the treasure hidden in Zanzibar's villas before the Dark Army could get its hands on it!"

Kintsuno was quite right. They had sheltered Zanzibar and his rebellion when Yuigarde's army had come looking for them, but only in exchange for a truly exorbitant fee. Zanzibar had sent messengers out to his hidden villas to procure treasures to pay their rates, not knowing that the Shadow King's underlings had tailed them. They didn't just track down all of those villas and plunder them for all they were worth; they found a map one of Zanzibar's minions had left behind that led them to the rest of his villas too. And then, they had stolen every last bit of hidden treasure.

"We have enough to live the high life for years!" Kintsuno yipped.

"Quite!" the Shadow King cheered. "One needs a good celebration now and again to invigorate the spirit!"

"I'll drink to that!" yipped Kintsuno.

"To celebration!" Gintsuno yipped.

The Shadow King nodded, satisfied, as the foxes' happy voices filled the room.

Chapter 3: Yuigarde Continues to Call It Quits

◇Dark Citadel—Throne Room◇

In the center of the Dark Citadel's throne room was set a great and elaborately carved throne. It was an ancient treasure on which the Dark Ones had sat since ages long past. Now, however, the Dark Regent Calsi'im sat on the stone floor in front of the throne.

Calsi'im's minion Tia, who had been standing at attention beside him, drew closer to the Dark Regent. "Shall I prepare a cup of tea for you, Calsi'im?"

"Oh, hello, Tia!" Calsi'im replied. "Thank you for thinking of me, but I'm afraid that our next guest is going to be here shortly!" He waved his hand, dismissing her.

"I see," Tia said. "Perhaps after, then..." She did an elegant curtsy and stepped back.

Just then, the throne room doors opened. "I've brought him as you asked, Lord Calsi'im." It was Rayne, the pandaman serving as prison guard. He was at the front of the group, with the spider demon luki in the back. Their prisoner, the devil Zanzibar, walked along between the pair.

Rayne and luki stepped before Calsi'im and signaled for Zanzibar to step forward. The two kept their spears trained on him, though, menacing him from behind. If he tried something, he would be skewered on the spot. It was the obvious thing to do given that the prisoner was the former head of a rebel army. But Calsi'im signaled for the two to stand down.

"Ah! Thank you for showing Mister Zanzibar to me, you two! There's no need for your spears."

"Hm? B-But Lord Calsi'im!" Rayne protested. "This man is the leader of the rebels! He's declared himself the enemy of the Dark Army!"

"Quite so," luki agreed. "You never know what someone like him will do..."

The two seemed on guard. But Calsi'im just smiled cheerfully. "Come now, come now! No need for that! It will be terribly difficult for me and Mister Zanzibar to have our chat with those things poking into his back!"

"I... I suppose that's true..." Rayne admitted.

"If it truly is your will, my lord..." said Iuki. Reluctantly, they lowered their spears and stepped back.

Calsi'im nodded, satisfied. "Very good. Now we can have a good and proper talk with no distractions."

"Hm," Zanzibar grunted. "I surmise that you recovered my treasures, then. Is that why you've called me here?"

Not long ago, Calsi'im had visited Zanzibar to discuss the Dark Army's cash flow problem. Even though they had been enemies until only recently, he had been frank about the danger the Dark Army was in and asked Zanzibar for help. Zanzibar was impressed by the Dark Regent's willingness to use even a surrendered enemy if they had talent and told him where the villas in which he had hidden his treasure were. He had suggested Calsi'im use that treasure to bolster the Dark Citadel's coffers.

"Well, actually, it seems we're in a bit of a pickle..." Calsi'im said, slumping his shoulders.

"A pickle? What do you mean by that?"

"Well, right after I spoke with you, I set out with Tia and my dire crow. We visited all of the manors on the map you gave us! The villas were there, all right, but the treasuries were all empty. They'd been completely hollowed out!"

"What?!" Zanzibar's eyes went wide. A tremor ran through his body. "H-How could this be? *None* of the treasure was intact?"

"Indeed..." Calsi'im said. "I checked each villa three times just to be sure..."

"We searched the hidden rooms you told us of, but there was indeed nothing there," Tia confirmed, sighing deeply.

"It seems your fears have come to pass, Mister Zanzibar," Calsi'im concluded. "Someone must have already taken your treasures!"

“No way! There’s just no way! I-It’s true that I thought someone *might* plunder my villas while I was away, but this is far too soon! There’s no way someone would have been able to find my hidden treasure in so short a time! Ghh...” Zanzibar clutched his head in pain, looking up at the throne room’s ceiling. *Why?! I never breathed a word about the villas to anyone! Those treasures were my personal savings for an emergency like this! I thought it was possible that one or two of them might be found, but all of them?! That’s simply impossible!*

Suddenly, Zanzibar opened his eyes wide. “No... Wait. I *did* use parts of my treasure. Many times, back when the Dark One was chasing us through the desert. I had need of it to pay some acquaintances of mine to help guide my army to a safe hiding spot...” Zanzibar’s shoulders were shaking. He could remember it clearly.

“I see...” Calsi’im sighed. “Well, it sounds like that deal didn’t go well at all! What a pity... I had been hoping that money would help us keep the Dark Citadel running properly until the Dark One gets back...”

Tia once again stepped up to her master. “I know I cannot do much,” she said, “but I am at your side, Calsi’im. We will find a way through this together.”

“Thank you, Tia...” Calsi’im said. “I know! Perhaps you should make tea for Mister Zanzibar and myself!”

“Of course! Just a second!” Tia’s face lit up at being asked to make her famous tea. She ran out of the room.

“Hmm...” Calsi’im heaved a sigh. “I have to do my best for little Tia as well! But nobody has seen the Dark One anywhere... Or Lady Phufun, for that matter.”

◇Meanwhile, in Osahka Town◇

The Dark One Yuigarde’s minion, the succubus Phufun, was at that moment flying around the world in search of her missing master. That day, her travels had taken her to the town of Osahka.

Osahka Town was within the territory of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode, so Phufun disguised herself as a demihuman in order to do her work. Right now,

she had a man in her grasp. Phufun was a slender woman, and the man was nearly three times her size, but she was holding him up by the throat with phenomenal strength. It was an awesome display of intimidation.

“I hear a man resembling Master Yuigarde took part in this Osahka Town Eating Contest of yours...” she said. “And you had the nerve to try and feed him cyarrots?! Well?!”

“W-W-W-Wait!” the man stammered, speaking desperately as Phufun held him in the air by his throat. “I-I-I was just one of the workers at the contest! I don’t have anything to do with the dishes they give contestants! A-A-And the ingredients are posted publicly, in accordance with Magical Kingdom’s decree s- so that if there’s something a contestant can’t eat, they can— Ghh...” The man, who had been growing whiter and whiter in the face, finally lost his power of speech and trailed off, gasping for air. But Phufun’s rage was unabated. She squeezed his throat harder.

“Master Yuigarde *hates* cyarrots!” she said. “Just the sight of them makes my mighty, proud, majestic master snivel like a wretched cat! I will *not* permit you fools to see him in such a state! Only your death will satisfy me.” Still holding the man above the ground with one hand, she used her other hand to push her false glasses up against the bridge of her nose.

There was a group of men surrounding her, but in the face of her sheer murderous aura, they were too frightened to even take a step.

But then a woman’s voice rang out. “You there! Is someone making trouble?!” The woman jumped out in front of the crowd of men. She was a beguiling woman wearing an eastern-style kimono, artfully loose around the shoulders to show a hint of bare skin. “You have quite some nerve causing a commotion in *my* territory,” she growled. “I am Fetabetcz, wolf of the cloth conglomerate Silkfleece! We’ll take care of this.” She gestured with her long-handled pipe towards Phufun.

“Aye-aye!” A group of men and women burst onto the scene at Fetabetcz’s words. They were dressed in a variety of eastern-style garments. They must have been other employees of the cloth conglomerate Silkfleece.

The Silkfleece head clerk Lil-Lil readied an array of magic guns she had hidden

in the sleeves of her kimono. “Taaaake...that!” she sang merrily. “And that, and that, and that! I’m not gonna let you bother Lady Fetabetz! No way!” She blew a raspberry at Phufun as she unleashed a volley of magic bullets.

“Wait!” Phufun cried. “What are you doing, young lady?! Can’t you see I’m still holding this human man?! Do you *want* to injure him?!” Indeed, Phufun brought the man in front of herself to block Lil-Lil’s attack. The man’s body took one bullet after another.

“Gwaaaahhhhh...” he cried, losing consciousness.

Lil-Lil aimed the still-smoking barrel of the gun in her right hand at Phufun. “Oh! How terrible! Poor Mister Gorrick! I won’t let you hurt him any more!”

“Wait!” Phufun said again. “*You’re* the one who hurt him, young lady! O-Oh!” She jumped back quickly, just in time to avoid being skewered by a great number of throwing weapons. “Like an arrow crossed with a spear...” She adjusted her glasses as she examined the weapons she had narrowly avoided, starting to sweat. “Is this, perhaps, the *kunai* used by the shinobi of the east? I hate to say it, but I’m not certain I can defeat this many of them. Perhaps I had best take my leave...”

“Phun!” Phufun shouted, focusing her magic power into her gaze, overwhelming them with pure malice. They stopped in their tracks. She sighed deeply. “Well then,” she said. “Excuse me.” Phufun was disguised as an avian demihuman—she spread her wings and flew up high in the sky.

“What are you fools doing?!” Fetabetz demanded, running up to Lil-Lil and her team. “You almost had her! Why did you let her get away?”

“Hee hee hee...” Lil-Lil giggled, hugging Fetabetz tight. “Lady Fetabetz, I love you...”

The others were right behind her. “Lady Fetabetz!”

“I adore you!”

“Hold me! Please!”

They rushed their leader, crying out needily for her attention. Looking closely, their eyes seemed to have gone heart-shaped.

Earlier, Phufun had used one of her succubus skills: the magic eye ability Love Pact. It caused her victims to temporarily lose control of their desires. Lil-Lil and the rest of the shinobi were all very fond of Fetabetz. Phufun's ability had caused that fondness to rampage out of control. Some of them had found their ways into the arms of their other companions, but more than half of the team was crowding around Fetabetz, desperate for her attention.

"Wh-What are you doing?!" Fetabetz demanded, fending the amorous horde off as best she could. But in the end, it was no use. "I'm glad you all feel that way, b-but we are still in broad daylight! A-Ah! Lil-Lil! Where are you touching—Hey! Who grabbed my chest?! A-Ahhh...!"



"Well..." Phufun sighed with relief as she soared above the clouds. "I was able to make it out unscathed. But it seems Osahka Town is under the control of that Fetabetz woman. To think that ordinary humans and demihumans could overwhelm a demon! Perhaps I need to revise my opinion on inferior life-forms..."

Phufun recalled the scene in her head—her master Yuigarde had just claimed the throne from his younger brother Gholl and marched out in force to attack Klyrode Castle. "With *my* power," he had boasted, "this'll be like taking candy from a baby!" Yuigarde had been festering with secret anger for a long time over Gholl's cautious disposition. He was furious that they hadn't gone to attack Klyrode Castle yet. It was only natural that this would be his first act as Dark One.

Most of the demons Yuigarde had led into battle shared his view—the humans would simply crumble before their awesome power. Phufun had been among them. But in the end, the invasion had been a failure. The Dark Army had advanced with no plan whatsoever, simply charging ahead only to fall prey one after another to the traps and ambushes of the Magical Kingdom's army. In the end, they were forced to retreat without ever coming within sight of the walls of the castle.

If I had stopped Master Yuigarde back then, Phufun reflected, the Dark Army would have never been weakened, and Zanzibar's rebellion would never even

have happened...

Gritting her teeth, Phufun pushed her false glasses up against the ridge of her nose. “Master Yuigarde...” she said. “I *will* find you, and I *will* bring you back to the Dark Citadel. And together, we will resurrect the Dark Army!” She nodded in determination and beat her wings, picking up speed as she soared through the sky.

“If I know Master Yuigarde, he’ll have gone north from here. This time, I’m certain of it! I just hope he hasn’t found a wife. A strong, tough woman he can punch as hard as he wishes...” Phufun’s face flushed red, and she began to squirm just thinking about it. “Oh, the sweet pain of my Master’s fist...” she moaned. “Simply thinking of it is making my panties all...”

Yes, Phufun was enough of a masochist that she took the beatings she received from Yuigarde as the highest form of pleasure.

“But this isn’t the time for that! I haven’t a second to lose! I must find Master Yuigarde before some *parasite* hooks her *claws* in him!” Clearing her throat and adjusting her glasses, Phufun beat her powerful wings and sped off towards the north.

◇Hilnanse City◇

Hero Gold-Hair and his party were staying at an inn in the outskirts of the shopping district of Hilnanse, a city to the north of Osahka. There, Dawkson, the newest addition to the crew, was pressing his lips against Valentine’s, one of Hero Gold-Hair’s followers. Secretly, Dawkson was the Dark One Yuigarde. He had changed his name and was currently disguised as a demihuman.

Dawkson was sitting cross-legged. Valentine, her arms draped over his shoulders, was kissing him back. “Mmm...” she moaned. A trail of saliva formed as their lips parted. It was shining faintly with magical light.

They kept it up for a few minutes, until Valentine pulled away with a big *smooch* sound. “Wonderful!” she chirped. “Your magic is as delectable as always, Dawkson.”

Dawkson wiped the drool from his mouth. “H-Hey!” he said, averting his gaze to hide his blush. “No problem! You can help yourself to all the magic you like!”

“Hee hee hee!” Valentine giggled, planting a teasing kiss on Dawkson’s cheek. “Thank you for breakfast, Dawkson! My magic reserves are running at a hundred and twenty percent!”

Valentine was from the Realm of Evil, a world separate from Klyrode. She made the decision to cut ties with her home and live in this world as a follower of Hero Gold-Hair, but the density of ambient magic in the world of Klyrode was much lower than in the Realm of Evil. In order to maintain the vast amount of magic power her own body needed, Valentine needed to constantly seek out sources of power.

She had a few options: She could absorb magic energy from beings with the ability to use magic, or else she could devour them entirely. She could convert food into magic energy and sustain herself that way. And finally, she could consume a magic item and take its power.

Up until now, Valentine had been getting her magic mostly from food. But because the magic power contained within normal food was so small, she had to eat a vast amount every day in order to survive. This had driven Tsuya, the group’s treasurer, nearly to despair.

“We woork and woork and woork, but our wallets are aaalways empty...” Tsuya had complained, tears in her eyes. In the end, they had decided that Dawkson, who had the most magical power of the group, should share some of his magic with Valentine.

“B-But Valentine!” Dawkson stammered. “We don’t need to k-kiss for me to transfer magic to you, do we? You know we can do it by holding hands, right?” Still flustered by the kiss, Dawkson scratched at his cheek with one of his fingers, holding out his other hand demonstratively. A pale light was glowing in his palm—his magic power.

But Valentine just laughed. “But what about etiquette?” she said. “You’re sharing your precious magic with me! Isn’t the proper thing to accept it with my mouth, so that I may show my gratitude? It seems much better than simply handing it over. Or is there someone you’re afraid might see us?” She smiled

flirtatiously, touching a finger to her lips.

Dawkson's face turned bright red at that. "Q-Quit messin' around!" he snapped. "You're just making things more complicated! There ain't no one like that!"

But despite Dawkson's words, the image of Phufun's face appeared unbidden in his mind. "H-Huh?" he muttered to himself, covering his face in embarrassment. "Wh-Why would I think about Phufun at a time like this? I-I mean...it's true that she's done lots of good work for me, but...but it isn't like *that*..."

"Now, now, Dawkson," Hero Gold-Hair said, laughing as he placed a hand on Dawkson's shoulder. "Let's not lose our heads! That's just Valentine's way of thanking you. The manly thing to do is take it in the spirit it's intended!"

"B-But Blondie..." Dawkson objected, furrowing his brow and scratching at his cheek with increasing fervor.

"That aside," Hero Gold-Hair said, smiling at him, "thanks to you, Valentine doesn't need to eat great big feasts every day! I should thank you as well!"

"Y-Yeah?" Dawkson said, a smile crossing his face. "I guess I appreciate that coming from you, Blondie..."

Tsuya stepped up close to Hero Gold-Hair to whisper in his ear. "U-Ummm," she said, "Hero Gooold-Hair... Maaaybe you shouldn't flatter Dawkson toooo much..."

"What do you mean, Tsuya?" Hero Gold-Hair tilted his head, puzzled. "I'm only telling him how I really feel. Is something wrong?"

"Nooo..." Tsuya said. "Nooothing's wrooong..." But her face was screwed up like she was on the verge of tears.

While the two were having their whispered conversation, Dawkson was beaming wide. "Gah ha ha!" he laughed. "Gettin' praised by you always makes me hungry, Blondie! Let's get some breakfast!" He cast his arm over Hero Gold-Hair's shoulder, and led him off in the direction of the restaurants.



Some time later, Dawkson was sitting in the crowded dining hall, greedily devouring a rice bowl. All around him, customers were whispering to each other about his gustatory exploits.

“That man... He sure eats a lot, even for his size!”

“I can hardly believe there are people out there who eat that much for breakfast!”

“Just watching him go at it is making me hungry...”

Dawkson finished up his bowl and held it aloft. “That was great!” he bellowed. “This is the life... Eating great meals from breakfast to dinner! Hey! Bring me another!”

A restaurant worker took Dawkson’s bowl, smiling happily as he replaced it with another heaping helping. “It’s a real pleasure seeing you enjoy our food, mister!”

Hero Gold-Hair and Tsuya were watching this scene play out from their seats nearby. “You seeee?” Tsuya said. “Dawkson aalways eats a looot after he gives Vaaalentine his magic energy... I really wish you wouldn’t say things that make him want to eat even mooore...”

“Indeed...” Hero Gold-Hair said, sweating as he watched Dawkson devour his bowl. “I had no idea it had gotten this bad... I suppose I had better go hunting for magic beasts after breakfast today...”

“Th-That would be a biiig heeelp...” Tsuya said, nodding earnestly.

All that Hero Gold-Hair and Tsuya had to eat was a small portion of rice and a bowl of soup each.

◇The Forest Outside Hilnanse City◇

After breakfast, Hero Gold-Hair’s party ventured forth to the forest located behind the inn.

“Hero Gooold-Hair!” Tsuya cried, smiling happily as she pointed to a corner in the forest where they could see a great big round hole in the ground. “It looks like soomething fell in that traap!”

“Indeed!” Hero Gold-Hair nodded, following Tsuya. “It must have caught a

magic beast!” The two peered into the hole to see a huge magic beast inside, unmoving, its neck snapped. Hero Gold-Hair had dug this pit trap the night before, and it looked like it had done its job.

“The Adventurer’s Association is sure to pay good money for a catch this big!” Gold-Hair declared. “Have at it, Valentine!”

“Leave it to me!” Valentine held out her arms, releasing a great array of thread from her fingertips. The threads went down into the hole, and after some time, the beast was wrapped up nice and tight in a spider cocoon and pulled out of the pit.

“And now it’s your turn, Dawkson!” instructed Hero Gold-Hair.

“Yeah! I’ve got this!” Dawkson hefted the beast onto the pile of five magic beasts he was already carrying on his shoulders. The sixth catch of the day rested neatly on top. He didn’t seem to be struggling at all with the enormous weight he was carrying. “Not a bad haul today, eh, Blondie?” he said, laughing loudly.

“Not bad at all!” Hero Gold-Hair agreed, resting his shovel on his shoulder and laughing along. “With this much just from our traps, we can probably wrap up our hunt early today!”

◇On the Highway◇

The Maiden Queen’s carriage continued along the highway. She was currently in the middle of her inspection of the kingdom. The carriage was accompanied by Knight Captain MacTaulo as well as the Queen’s elite guard, led by Guard Captain Boralis herself.

“Tell me, Boralis,” the Queen said. “Has there been any news concerning the whereabouts of the criminal Hero Gold-Hair?”

“Your Majesty...” Boralis began. “We had wanted posters sent to every city and village in the city—even small hamlets—and we have guards in all corners of the kingdom on the lookout for him, but I’m afraid we lack any solid information as of yet...”

“I see...” the Queen said. “At the very least, I would like to retrieve the treasure he stole from the castle sanctuary: the Drilldozer Shovel. It is a

legendary magic item of great power, and very useful for rebuilding in the aftermath of a disaster...”

“I understand very well,” Boralis said, bowing deeply. “The Drilldozer Shovel is a treasure of the Magical Kingdom and should be used for the good of the land. It pains me to see it in the hands of that false hero...”

The Maiden Queen nodded in emphatic agreement. *I wonder what Hero Gold-Hair is using it for... she thought. If he tried to sell it, he would be caught right away, but I've heard no reports of such a thing happening. I wonder if he is using it to trap magic beasts in holes or some other such nonsense...*

Worried, the Maiden Queen turned her gaze outside the carriage window.

◇The Forest outside Hilnanse City◇

“Right, that does it!” Hero Gold-Hair let out a breath and shouldered the Drilldozer Shovel. All around him was an enormous number of freshly dug pit traps.

Tsuya stared at the scene in front of her with wide eyes. “Woow...” she said. “That Drilldozer Shovel is amaaazing! I can’t belieeeve you dug aaall those traps in just a seeecond!”

“You’re not wrong,” Valentine said. She was looking on with no less awe than Tsuya. “There aren’t a lot of magic items that can do that, even in the Realm of Evil!”

“Believe me, I know full well how amazing this thing is!” Hero Gold-Hair said, beaming with pride. “It’s my trusty partner, after all!”

“That thing’s your partner, Blondie?” Dawkson asked.

“Quite right, Dawkson! I’m sure you have some weapons that suit you better than others, no?”

“W-Well, I suppose so...” Dawkson said. “But in the end, it all comes down to power, right?”

“Well, power *is* important for a weapon,” Hero Gold-Hair admitted, grinning. “But what I’m talking about is more... Well, you know! Weapons can give you unexpected strength if you treat them right!”

“Yeah?” Dawkson said, a mysterious, faraway look on his face. “You don’t say...”

When he had been the Dark One, Dawkson had never been picky about his weapon. “My own power is the strongest weapon!” he would say. Whether it was a greatsword or a halberd, he would just swing it around wildly, charging ahead. If it broke, he would simply replace it with another. *I don’t really get it...* he thought. *But if Blondie says it, it must be true.*

Afterwards, Hero Gold-Hair hid his pitfall traps underneath layers of grass and fallen leaves. Valentine further concealed the presence of the traps with magic, and the group set out back towards Hilnanse City.

◇Hilnanse City—Adventurer’s Association◇

“Woow!” Tsuya’s eyes lit up. “Hero Gooold-Hair! Looook at all the moooney they gave us for the magic beeeasts!” She ran up to him, overjoyed.

“I-Idiot!” Hero Gold-Hair snapped, clapping a hand over Tsuya’s mouth. “This is the Adventurer’s Association! What if someone’s seen my wanted poster?!”

“Mhf!” Tsuya said. “Mhrhrf!” (Translation: “Oooh, that’s riiight...”)

Hero Gold-Hair cleared his throat and put on a theatrical voice. “I-Indeed!” he said. “This is quite the sum of money! I, Golden-Haired Braveman, am most pleased! Truly!”

“Golden-Haired Braveman” was a pseudonym he had come up with to fool anyone hunting for Hero Gold-Hair.

“Got it?” he whispered into Tsuya’s ear. “Valentine might have changed my appearance with magic, but we never know when we’re gonna be found out! At the very least, be careful when there’s a lot of people around!”

Hero Gold-Hair’s hand still over her mouth, Tsuya nodded. “Mhrf...” she said. (Translation: “Okaaay...”)



They left the Adventurers' Association in a hurry, hoping to avoid as much notice as they could, when they were greeted by another one of Hero Gold-Hair's followers: the shadow demon Riliangiu, who had soundlessly appeared behind them. "A moment," she said.

"Hm?" Hero Gold-Hair said. "What's wrong, Riliangiu?"

"There is something I wish to show you, Sir Hero Gold—I mean, Sir Golden-Haired Braveman." She held out a piece of paper—a wanted poster for someone named Wuha Gappoli.

"What's this?" Hero Gold-Hair asked. "A wanted poster with a name but no portrait? Hmm... The bounty is quite high, though..."

"Precisely," Riliangiu said. "Wuha Gappoli, it seems, is a djinn. Nobody has yet been able to glean their true form."

"A djinn?!" Hero Gold-Hair and Tsuya exclaimed in perfect unison.

"Just so," said Riliangiu. "A djinn."

"But..." Hero Gold-Hair protested. "How are we supposed to hunt this djinn if nobody knows what they look like?"

"Ordinarily we could not," Riliangiu said. "However, it just so happens that I have obtained information that may be of use to us."

Riliangiu had once been one of Valentine's subordinates—a spy of sorts. Her job was to monitor the state of affairs of the world of Klyrode. Now that she was Hero Gold-Hair's follower, she used her abilities to find information that could be useful to the party.

"Meaning," Hero Gold-Hair said, "there's a chance we could collect this bounty..."

"Precisely." Riliangiu nodded emphatically.

"All right. In that case, let's get on it! We'll meet up with Valentine and Dawkson outside, and head out immediately!"

"Yes, sir. I will show you the way." Riliangiu opened the door to the Adventurers' Association, allowing Hero Gold-Hair to step outside before

following him out herself.

◇Deep in a Forest—Part 1◇

A wagon clattered down a forest path, somewhere deep in the woods. The driver was a small-bodied woman—Greanyl of the Fli-o'-Rys General Store. She inclined her head, puzzled. "Are you certain this is the right road, Lord Dalc Horst? It seems different from how it was laid out on the map..."

"Nothing to worry about, Greanyl," Dalc Horst said. "This is just a shortcut to Hilnanse City. There are rumors about this place, so it doesn't see much use."

"Rumors?" Greanyl asked. "You mean about Wuha Gappoli?"

"Ah, of course a former elite Silent Listener would know. Yes, it seems Wuha appears in this part of the woods. Ordinary wagons would never get past."

"I see..." Greanyl said. "The mysterious djinn who makes a habit of waylaying merchants and departing with their inventory..."

"We shouldn't have any problems, though!" Dalc Horst declared. "My former subordinate Iracus said there were no issues when he passed through these parts!"

"Indeed. If the rumors are true, we are unlikely to come under attack." Greanyl nodded knowingly. "By the way, Lord Dalc Horst, may I ask you something?"

"Oh? What is it, Greanyl?"

"Just something that's been on my mind. I'm certain that it was your subordinate Iracus you mentioned earlier who was meant to be pulling my wagon today. Why did you swap in right before we left?"

"A-Ah! Well... Iracus had some other work he had to attend to, you see. I'm just covering his shift!" Dalc Horst spoke quickly. He was obviously hiding something.

Strange... Greanyl thought, cocking her head. *Didn't I hear Iracus say Dalc Horst had bullied him into switching...?*

"W-Well," Dalc Horst went on. "Putting that aside, would you like to get dinner together in Hilnanse City, perhaps?"

“No, thank you,” Greanyl said. “I have some intelligence work I need to do in the area. You can eat dinner by yourself.”

“Wh-What? Another no?”

“I have work, I’m afraid.”

The wagon continued down the road and out of sight. Then, a voice rose from somewhere in the forest. “Jeez! Those guys were crazy strong! I’m not attacking them, that’s for sure!”

◇Deep in a Forest—Part 2◇

“Hmm...” Hero Gold-Hair muttered as he inspected the state of the road. “It looks like a wagon passed by not too long ago.” True to his words, there were fresh wheel tracks on the highway.

“Hm?” said Valentine. “Did Wuha Gappoli not attack this one?”

“So it seems.” Riliangiu nodded. “Perhaps it had a guard of formidable mercenaries, or perhaps the wagon driver themselves was too dangerous to attack.”

“Huh?” Dawkson asked. “What does that mean?”

“I don’t believe Wuha Gappoli will attack the strong, sir,” Riliangiu explained.

“They won’t attack the strong?” parroted Dawkson.

“So it seems. Their reasons are unknown, but Wuha Gappoli apparently only targets the weak.”

“Well, *that’s* pretty pathetic,” said Dawkson. “You sure they’re a djinn?”

“I am certain. According to my investigations, they will only attack if they are certain they can win. Perhaps they are simply cautious...”

“Hm.” Hero Gold-Hair ruminated on this information. “I suppose I can understand that. But Riliangiu, doesn’t that leave us out of luck?” He cast his gaze behind him at Dawkson, who was in truth the Dark One Yuigarde, and Valentine, one of the Twelve Evil Generals from the Realm of Evil. “Won’t the djinn avoid us with you two here?”

“Yes,” said Riliangiu. “I had that concern as well. That is why I made preparations of my own with some help from Lady Valentine’s Concealment magic...”

Riliangiu led the party into a thicket, where they found a rickety old wagon. Before long they were on their way down the road—with Dawkson, dressed in a slave’s rags, pulling the wagon. Thanks to Valentine’s spell, he looked like an emaciated dwarf. In the wagon was Valentine, disguised as an aged witch, and Riliangiu, who was dressed in a maid uniform, playing the part of her servant. Hero Gold-Hair and Tsuya sat in front, on the driver’s platform.

“H-Hey, Riliangiu!” Hero Gold-Hair objected. “How come me and Tsuya aren’t wearing disguises?”

“I can explain, sir,” Riliangiu replied. “If all of us were to wear such disheveled clothing, Wuha Gappoli might refrain from attacking for *that* reason instead. The djinn’s objective, after all, is to rob wagons of their valuables.”

“I see... All right, then.” Hero Gold-Hair nodded.

Huh! Dawkson thought as he listened in on the pair. *She learned everything she could ahead of time, and used that information to make sure the plan doesn’t fail! Back when I was the Dark One, I thought I could do everything with raw power! If I had known how important information was, I’d have tried to stop Ghol’s Silent Listeners from leaving the Dark Army...* He bit his lip, reliving painful memories of his failed march on Klyrode Castle and pursuing Zanzibar’s rebel army through the desert on a fruitless chase.

Dawkson pulled the wagon on through the forest road. The trees were growing thick around them. “Hm?” Hero Gold-Hair suddenly uttered.

“Wh-What iiis it, Hero *Gol—mpffffh?!* ” Tsuya began, but Hero Gold-Hair clamped a hand over her mouth again before she could let slip his identity.

“Idiot!” he chided, leaning in to whisper in her ear. “You’ll put Wuha Gappoli on guard if they hear you use the word ‘Hero!’ I told you! Just call me Gold-Hair!”

“*Mfff! Mffffff!*” said Tsuya, nodding agreeably. (Translation: “Oh, riiight! I’m sooorry...”)

Valentine glanced over at Hero Gold-Hair and Tsuya from her seat inside the wagon. *That's amazing...* she marveled. *My lord Hero Gold-Hair can understand Lady Tsuya even when her mouth is covered! Goodness! I'm a bit jealous of her...* She puffed out her cheeks in a pout.

"Lady Valentine..." Riliangiu said, stepping up to the former Evil General.

"I know, I know!" Valentine muttered back quietly. "My lord has noticed as well. It seems they've made their appearance..." The pair turned to look outside the wagon cover with an air of nonchalance.

Hero Gold-Hair, from the driver's seat, surveyed the woods around them. "Look, Tsuya! That tree seems quite peculiar!" He pointed at a strangely shaped branch with seven large knobs along its length. They passed the tree by, but a moment later, Tsuya's eyes went wide.

"H-Huuuh?!"

Ahead of them, the tree they had passed with the weird branch was back, waiting for them. "I don't believe you could find two trees with a branch like that in the whole forest!" Hero Gold-Hair whispered. "Looks like we've been going in circles for a while now..."

"Whaaa—?!" Tsuya exclaimed. "Th-Then, Wuha Gappoli is after our haaard-earned moooney?!" She clutched the Bottomless Bag containing their wallet tightly.

Hero Gold-Hair placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. And the wagon rattled on, circling the same spot again and again.



They continued circling for quite some time indeed.

"H-H-Hero— N-No, I mean, Lord Gooold-Hair, what do we dooo?" Tsuya asked, trembling beside Hero Gold-Hair. "We're gonna be stuck in the fooorest after daaark..."

Indeed, the already dimly lit forest was growing darker by the minute.

"Hey, Blondie!" said Dawkson, putting down the reins to the wagon he had been pulling and scratching his head. "I think it might be dangerous to keep

pulling the wagon when it's this dark!"

"I suppose..." Hero Gold-Hair said. "Perhaps we should light the magic lamp..." He turned to look back over his shoulder at the inside of the wagon, where Valentine and Riliangiu sat. But before he could do anything, Tsuya cried out, pointing ahead to a corner of the forest.

"Ah! Lord Gooold-Hair! There's a liiight! I can see a liiight!"

"A light?"

"Yees! A liiight! Look! It's right over theeere!" Tsuya beamed happily at him. "It muuust be a mountain iinn! We should stay theeere for the night!"

"Yeah..." Dawkson grunted, nodding. "I'm getting hungry too. Wonder if they've got food..."

"Hm..." Hero Gold-Hair cocked his head, musing. "Well, we're not getting anywhere like this. Let's try going towards the light."

"All right!" Dawkson cheered. "Leave it to me, Blondie! Finally, some food!" He picked the reins back up and pulled the wagon onwards, a new spring in his step. Dawkson was extremely hungry, and eager to waste no time.

Before long, the wagon came up to the place they had seen the light to find an inn. There was a lantern lit, illuminating the inn's signboard.

"There's lights on inside!" Dawkson said. "Looks like they're open, Blondie! Hells yeah! We're getting food after all!" He gleefully pulled the wagon into the wagon stop beside the building.

"Oh, an inn?" Valentine whispered to Riliangiu. "*This* certainly seems like *something*."

"Perhaps they mean to ambush us inside..." Riliangiu whispered back.

"Sooo..." Tsuya said, still clutching the Bottomless Bag tight in her arms as she interjected, "I gueeess we should go insiiide?"

The three looked at Hero Gold-Hair, who was staring fixedly at the inn. "Hero... I mean, Lord Gooold-Hair?" Tsuya asked. "What's wrooong?"

"It's certainly fishy..." Valentine said. "But I don't sense any magic energy..."

“Even if this is *their* doing,” said Riliangiu, “it seems likely that they are observing us from somewhere else.”

“Well, if Valentine and Riliangiu say so, Blondie, what are we waiting for?” bellowed Dawkson. “I’m starving!” He took off at a run for the inn’s entrance.

“Wait!” said Hero Gold-Hair. “Hold on just a minute, Dawkson!”

“Gwah?! What’s up, Blondie?”

“Look,” Hero Gold-Hair said. “Just wait a bit.” He continued staring at the entrance to the inn. Dawkson, Tsuya, and Valentine lined up behind him. “I can hardly believe it, but my intuition is telling me...” He trailed off, retrieving the Drilldozer Shovel from his Bottomless Bag. Then, holding it in both hands, he turned back to face the inn. All four of his party—Tsuya, Dawkson, Valentine, and Riliangiu—watched with bated breath. “...That the inn itself is Wuha Gappoli!”

“Whaaat?!” all four exclaimed at once, expressions of utter surprise on their faces.

“N-No waaay! Um... There’s no way, right, Lord Gooold-Hair?” said Tsuya.

“Come on, Blondie!” said Dawkson. “That’s just ridiculous!”

“I must agree,” Valentine added. “I don’t sense even a trace of a djinn’s magic energy...”

“Indeed,” agreed Riliangiu. “As much as I may hate to say it...”

But whatever the others had to say, Hero Gold-Hair had already started digging a hole. In mere seconds, it was already deep enough that he had vanished out of sight under the ground.

“Huh?! L-Lord Gooold-Hair?!” Tsuya shouted down the hole.

The others came up behind her to look, when suddenly, while they were staring down the hole Hero Gold-Hair had disappeared into, the inn began to shake. The four shouted in bewilderment.

“Whaaa?!” cried Tsuya.

“H-Hey! What’s going on?!” demanded Dawkson.

“I-I don’t know!” said Valentine.

“This wasn’t in my intelligence!” Riliangiu despaired.

The inn shook and shook, and then a giant eyeball appeared on the wall, leering at the party.

“Impossible!” the house said in a shrill voice. “To think someone could see through the cunning disguise of Wuha Gappoli!”

“What?!” All four of Hero Gold-Hair’s companions stared back in utter shock.

“S-So...” said Tsuya. “The inn really *waaas* Wuha Gappoli?”

“I thought Blondie was just kidding...” said Dawkson.

“It must be!” said Valentine. “Once that eyeball appeared, I started sensing their magic as well!”

“It really was Wuha Gappoli...” echoed Riliangiu.

They glanced at each other and nodded, finally understanding the situation.

“Fwa ha ha!” Wuha Gappoli laughed. “I suppose you’ve found me out! Indeed, it is I, Master Wuha Gappoli, the mansion djinn! I use my powers to lead merchants’ wagons astray on the road, making them pass the same place time and time again! And when they’re good and exhausted, I appear to them in the form of an inn! Why, that wretched dwarf of yours was just seconds away from stepping inside of me looking for food! My mouth would have given him quite the welcome! And then, when you were all in my stomachs, I was going to help myself to your merchandise!” Wuha’s doors and windows opened and closed, their shrill laughter filling the air.

“I see!” said Valentine. “So you have the ability to hide your magic energy while you’re disguised as a house. But I suppose it’s not much use to you if we know who you are.” She took a step forward.

“Oooh?” said Wuha Gappoli. “What’s an ancient old crone going to do against the likes of me? You’d be better off preparing yourselves to be eaten!” With their doors opened wide, the inn’s entrance expanded left and right, becoming a mouth full of rows and rows of needle-sharp teeth.

But Valentine didn’t even flinch. “My, my...” she said. “Judging your opponent

by her appearances, are we? What a foolish house.” Snickering, she raised her hand in the air. “Now, let’s see who this old crone *really* is!”

The very ground began to rumble.

“Whaha?! Wait! Wh-What’s that noise?! Wait! M-My foundation! Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no!” Wuha Gappoli cried out frantically. Their house frame began to shake more and more, until...

Crash!

An enormous hole appeared in the ground beneath the inn. Wuha Gappoli fell out of sight.

“Ah...ha?” Valentine said, frozen in her transformation pose. Her opponent was gone. The four of them peered down the hole to see Hero Gold-Hair, shovel in hand, climbing his way out of the pit.

“Guess I made it just in time!” he said.

Hero Gold-Hair had immediately sensed that the inn was Wuha Gappoli transformed, and dug a pitfall trap big enough to catch an entire inn. The whole thing took very little time to finish, all thanks to the legendary artifact, the Drilldozer Shovel, which was capable of digging thousands of times faster than any mundane tool.



With the rest of the party’s help, Hero Gold-Hair climbed his way out of the pit he’d dug. He stood at the edge, surveying his handiwork with folded arms.

“Oooh, I’m faaaaalling! I’m faaaaaalling!” Wuha Gappoli cried out, and then their voice fell silent, as though they were unconscious. And their form was...

“Oh nooo,” said Tsuya. “They’re still an iinn...”

“Hey, look!” said Dawkson. “I think they’re getting smaller!”

Just as Dawkson said, the inn in the hole was growing smaller and smaller, until it finally assumed a form resembling a human girl.

“I suppose that must be Wuha Gappoli’s true form...” said Valentine.

“Yes.” Riliangiu nodded. “I sense about as much magic energy as I did before.”

“Hmm...” said Hero Gold-Hair. “So that’s our bounty, then? Valentine, care to string ’em up?”

“Gladly!” Valentine held out her arm, transforming from her old crone disguise back to her usual beguiling form as one of the Twelve Evil Generals. Threads shot out from her fingertips, down into the hole, where they wrapped the unconscious Wuha Gappoli up in a spiderlike cocoon. She set the girl down in front of the party.

“Now,” said Hero Gold-Hair, “let’s get them back to the Adventurers’ Association so we can collect the prize!”

Tsuya cheered and jumped in the air, holding her Bottomless Bag tight even now. “Yaaaay! With a prize thaaat big, we don’t have to worry about money for haaalf a yeeear!”

Just then, Wuha Gappoli’s eyes shot open, awakened by the sound of Tsuya’s celebrations. “Hey!” she protested. “What the heck?! What’s with all this thread?! I can’t move my body!” Try as she might, all she could do was wiggle in the cocoon. Wrapped tight by Valentine’s spider thread, she could hardly move at all.

Hero Gold-Hair knelt down and brought his face close to the mischievous djinn’s. “So you’re the famous Wuha Gappoli, I take it?”

“I am,” Wuha said. “What of it, old man?”

“O-Old?! You little brat! I’ll have you know I’m *quite* young!”

“Shut up! You’re old to a teenager like me! All of you losers look like lame old geezers.”

She couldn’t move her body, but Wuha Gappoli was determined to use whatever means she had to attack the party. At the moment, that was limited to words.

“May I gag her, my lord Hero Gold-Hair?” Valentine asked. “Please?”

“Wait, Valentine,” Hero Gold-Hair answered. “First, I need to give her a good talking-to!”

“I dunnooo...” said Tsuya. “That sounds booring. Can’t we just gaaag her?”

“I agree with Miss Tsuya,” said Riliangiu.

“N-Nooo!” Wuha Gappoli shrieked, halfway to tears. “I’m sorry! I’m sorry! You’re all lovely *young* men and women! I was just being mean! There—I apologized! Please don’t do anything mean!”

Hero Gold-Hair crossed his arms and regarded the girl sternly. “Wuha Gappoli,” he said. “You are wanted by the Adventurers’ Association. For a considerable sum, no less! And we’ll be handing you over to them, in exchange for...”

Wuha Gappoli looked up frantically. “N-No! Forgive me! I’m so sorry! I won’t do bad things anymore! Please don’t take me to the Adventures’ Association! I don’t wanna go to jail!” She begged and begged for all she was worth.

“But,” said hero Gold-Hair, “weren’t you just telling us about how you like to lead merchants astray, devour them, and take their goods? We can’t exactly let someone like *that* go free, can we?”

“Th-That was all lies! I thought it would make me sound cool! I-I’m practically a vegetarian! I don’t eat humans! B-But...I do steal things, sometimes...”

“Hmph. Then I suppose we’d better turn you in to the Adventurer’s Association after all!”

“No! Anything but that! I’ll do anything! I’ll grant you any wish you could ask for! I don’t want to spend the rest of my teenage years in jail!”

Hero Gold-Hair sighed in exasperation. *Now that she’s been caught, she’s just your average delinquent, isn’t she...*

◇Hilnanse City◇

A few days later, Hero Gold-Hair went to the Adventurers’ Association in Hilnanse City. When she saw the enormous amount of merchandise he had brought, the rabbit girl working as the Association’s receptionist opened her eyes wide in shock.

“A-Amazing! This must be everything stolen by Wuha Gappoli! Even this thing! And this!” She was going through the items with a list of stolen goods in her hand, checking it against the recovered loot. Her eyes sparkled. “If you’ve

recovered all this, Mister Golden-Haired Braveman...that must mean you've caught Wuha Gappoli!"

"I'm afraid not..." Hero Gold-Hair said, grimacing. "They're pretty good at running away, it turns out! But as they fled before me, I heard them say something like, 'I'm never coming back to this forest!' I think they've probably left for good. Terribly sorry."

"Oh no, not at all!" the rabbit girl said. "We're very grateful for all that you've done! Now people will be able to use the forest road without worrying about getting attacked! I'll talk with the chief, and see if I can get them to pay you the bounty." Without waiting for a response, she bounded off towards the back room.

"Personally, I'd like to get this over with as soon as possible..." Hero Gold-Hair muttered as he took a seat in a nearby chair. "Well, she's thanking me, I suppose. I can wait."

But no sooner had he sat down than the adventurers in the building began to crowd around him. "Wow!" one of them said. "You must be something else! You got back everything Wuha Gappoli stole? But no one even knows what they look like!"

"And you chased them out of the forest to boot!" added another.

"I knew from the moment I set eyes on you that you had potential!" a third piped in.

"Hey, who are you, anyway?" said a fourth. "You kinda look like that wanted criminal, Hero Gold-Hair!"

Hero Gold-Hair couldn't help flinching at that last one. *They're gossiping about me...* he thought. *We'd better get out of this city as soon as we can...* He forced himself to smile, though, and gave all the adventurers a friendly greeting.

The rest of Hero Gold-Hair's party was watching from outside the window.

"Eee hee hee!" Wuha Gappoli giggled, grinning to herself as she watched. "Thanks to me, Hero Gold-Hair's the talk of the town!"

Valentine bopped the girl lightly on the head. “Don’t get a big head, girl,” she said. “All I remember *you* doing is wailing and screaming.”

“Gah! Valentine! Stop rubbing it in!” Wuha Gappoli scratched the back of her head, clearly embarrassed. “But still,” she said, “I’m part of the group now, and I’m gonna do my best! Wuha Gappoli, at your service! Wuha G for short!”

Meanwhile, inside, things had only continued to intensify. The adventures had grabbed Hero Gold-Hair by the arms and legs and were preparing to toss him in the air in celebration.

“Hooray for Golden-Haired Braveman!” they cheered.

“Hooray!”

“Okay, toss him on three!”

“W-Wait!” Hero Gold-Hair protested. “I’m not—!” But it was too late. Despite his best efforts to escape, he was hurled into the air by the crowd with a celebratory whoop. The rest of the party, the newest member Wuha G included, smiled as they watched.

◇Meanwhile...◇

Far to the north of Hilnanse, where Dawkson and the rest of the party were staying, Phufun was deep in the snowy mountains. The wind was fierce and cold.

“I-I was certain I’d find Master Yuigarde somewhere around here...” she chattered through frozen teeth. “But I must have been mistaken...”

She pressed her glasses up on the ridge of her nose, but it didn’t help—the lenses were covered in snow. She couldn’t see anything.

Th-That’s strange... she thought. I know my intuition was leading me here...

Chapter 4: Let's Go to Summer Camp!

◇Houghtow City—Houghtow College of Magic◇

It was evening, and the walls of the Houghtow College of Magic looked red in the light of the setting sun. The grade school students had already left for the day, leaving the college for the adult classes. But today, mixed in among the adult students were the parents and guardians of the grade schoolers, headed towards the school dormitory.

There was a sign on the school door reading “Parent-Teacher Conference,” and another on the dormitory entrance reading “Parent-Teacher Conference Assembly Room,” as well as arrows guiding the guardians.

Among the crowd of parents were Flio and Rys. “Now,” said Rys, “we must listen with our full attention!” She squeezed her fists tight, psyching herself up. Rys was a gorgeous woman with a well-arranged face, a generous bosom, and a slender waist. The men around her, and even some of the women, kept stealing glances. But Rys didn't seem to notice at all. She had eyes only for Flio.

“Yes, of course,” Flio said. “It's only been half a year since they opened the lower-grades department of the College of Magic, but the teachers have been doing their best for the kids. They've been trying all sorts of things to see what works. We should lend them whatever support we can.”

“Exactly, my lord husband! I, Rys, will do my utmost to be of use!” Rys nodded emphatically.

Rys usually went around disguised as a demihuman, but in truth, she was a lupine demon—feared even among demonkind for their ferocity and love of combat. The first time she'd met Flio, she had tried to attack him only to find herself utterly thwarted. She had been trying to kill him; it would have only been understandable for him to take her life in turn. But instead, he let her go. Impressed by his strength and kindness, she chose to live alongside Flio as his wife.

Lupine demons have powerful pack-forming instincts. As the wife of the leader of a pack, Rys considered her husband's words to be absolute. And almost as if acting on those same pack instincts, Flio became the head of a large household. Rys, accordingly, committed herself to looking after everyone Flio had taken in. As today's conference concerned Garyl and Elinàsze—the children of Flio, the head of the pack, and herself—she was even more fired up than usual.

Flio smiled at his wife's behavior. *I never imagined I'd be going to a parent-teacher conference at my own children's school...*

Flio was originally from another world. He had been summoned to this world, directly to Klyrode Castle, as a Hero candidate.

Especially since I never even so much as went on a date in my previous world... he continued to muse. *Although, I suppose I was getting pretty friendly with Quinn from the Quinn Company. But that was because we were both merchants! I wouldn't say we were romantically involved or anything...*

Rys grabbed onto her husband's arm. Flio looked over to see his wife shrouded in a sinister aura of malicium, fixing him with a sharp-eyed look.

"Wh-What's the matter, Rys?" he asked.

"My lord husband..." Rys said, squeezing his arm tighter. "You weren't thinking of another woman, were you? I just had the sense... Not someone at the house or the general store... Some other girl..."

Flio grimaced awkwardly. "Oh," he said. "Yeah. I was just remembering a girl I knew from work, long ago...back before I met you."

"I see..." Rys said. "Well, that isn't a problem, then." Her sinister aura vanished, and her usual bright smile returned to her face. "I'm not about to find fault with the relationships you had before you and I met. I am not *that* jealous of a woman."

"I-I see!" said Flio. "I'm relieved to hear it. Oh! It sounds like the conference is starting soon!"

Flio hurried on into the conference room, Rys clinging close to his arm.

◇Houghtow College of Magic—Conference Room◇

“Ahem! Good evening, parents and guardians! Thank you for finding the time in your busy schedules to join us.” The administrator Taclyde, who was in charge of the meeting, bowed politely to the assembled group. The other lower-grade teachers were lined up beside him—the offensive magic teacher Oryou, and the defensive magic teacher Belano, who happened to be one of Flio’s housemates.

Rys, however, would not take her eyes off the teacher sitting next to Taclyde.

“What’s wrong, Rys?” Flio whispered when he noticed.

“Oh...” she said. “That blue-haired teacher sitting next to Belano...I feel like I’ve seen her before...” She tilted her head, puzzled, as she kept staring at the blue-haired woman.

The teacher, on the other hand, knew precisely who Rys was. She had begun to sweat the moment she noticed her in the room. *Wh-What isss Fenrysss, the former Infernal candidate, doing here?! I-It ssseems she hasn’t seen through my demihuman disguissse yet, but...thiss could be bad...* Her snakelike tongue darted in and out of her mouth with worry.

Her nameplate read: “Nyt: Illusion Magic Teacher.”

Nyt was disguised as a demihuman snake person, but in truth, she was once one of the Infernal Four—this was Yorminyt, the Serpent Princess. Yorminyt had little love for Yuigarde’s violent and despotic disposition, and when he’d abandoned his throne and vanished, she’d given up on the Dark Army and left the Dark Citadel. She came to Houghtow City, where she found employment as a teacher at the College of Magic.

When Rys had used the name “Fenrys” and Nyt had used the name “Yorminyt,” both of them had served in the Dark Army, and of course they had seen each other many times in and around the Dark Citadel. But because Nyt’s form was disguised by her illusions, even the sharp-eyed Rys could only vaguely tell that she had seen her somewhere before.

Rys kept staring. Nyt did the best she could to pretend she hadn’t noticed, staring determinedly to the side. And as their peculiar sparring match went on,

Taclyde opened his mouth to resume his opening remarks.

“Well, then!” he said. “To commemorate half a year of our lower-grade program, we’ve been thinking of holding a summer camp, for both the students and their parents! Of course, whether this happens or not is up to you!”

Belano, who had been sitting near Taclyde, stood up. She picked up her step stool and began hefting it over towards the blackboard. Then, climbing onto the stool and standing on her tiptoes to reach the very top of the blackboard, she wrote the words “Parent-Student Summer Camp.” Belano was a small woman and needed the stool to reach the top of the blackboard. Even then, she had to stretch her arm as far as she could.

“You can do it!” the parents quietly cheered, encouraging her.

“Hang in there!”

Belano bowed deeply, as if thanking the parents for their support, and went back to writing on the blackboard.

“Now, the first order of business is to decide *where* we should go!” said Taclyde. “I thought perhaps, since it’s the first time, we should go to the nearby Mt. Kino. We could climb to the top and hold the camp at the summit! But now that we’ve signed a peace treaty with the Dark Army, it occurred to me that we could go many more places.”

As he spoke, Belano wrote on the blackboard: “Potential Destinations: Klyrode Castle, Kinosaki Hot Springs, Calgosi Coast...”

Taclyde smirked as Belano expanded the list. “The destinations here were from a survey we sent out to the students the other day. I suppose some of them are rather childish! There’s no way we could make it to some of those places and back in a single day...” It took an entire week to get to Klyrode Castle from Houghtow City, and the Calgosi Coast took nearly two months for a one-way trip. “But still, we went through all the trouble of the survey, and these *are* the children’s wishes! But perhaps we’ll consider their opinions and come up with a more realistic destination...” Taclyde looked around the room.

All over, parents and guardians started voicing their opinions.

“I know it’s not very realistic, but I *would* like to go to the beach...”

“Yes, if it were possible, I would very much like to go.”

“I agree. It sounds fun!”

Houghtow City was set far inland in the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode. The nearest coastline was the Calgosi Coast, far to the south. But it would take two months to get to Calgosi by carriage, and they would have to pass through a difficult mountainous region.

The Calgosi Coast was considered part of the Magical Kingdom, but it was governed separately. It wasn't the kind of trip that an ordinary person could make on a whim. But many people living in Klyrode made a point of visiting Calgosi at least once in their life. That was why the parents, as well as the kids, were so excited for the prospect of visiting the beach.

Taclyde's expression gloomed. *I thought something like this might happen... The children learned about the Calgosi Coast in their geography lessons, and before I knew it, it was the number one response in the survey.*

“Um...” he ventured. “Err... A few of you have mentioned the Calgosi Coast. It's true, it was the most desired destination among the students...but I'm terribly sorry, it simply isn't realistic for a one-day summer camp.” He bowed his head gravely.

“I knew it...” one of the parents said.

“And here I got my hopes up...”

All over the room, people were expressing their disappointment. Taclyde sighed. “Well, that's just how it is. We can't go to the coast, but perhaps we could go to Bilwan Lake! That's close by...”

“Excuse me?” Flio said, raising his hand.

“Oh! Yes, Mister Flio?”

“Correct me if I'm wrong, but all you need is a way to get the students, their guardians, and the teachers to the Calgosi Coast quickly, right?”

“Eh? Well...yes, but... Do you have some sort of plan?”

“Of a sort...” Flio stood up and held out his hand towards the door of the conference room. A magic circle appeared. It shone with mystic light and

rotated, then slowly moved to the door of the room, where it disappeared. The door to the conference room shone for a second. “You see,” Flio said, opening the door, “this way we can all go right there...”

Outside of the door should have been the Houghtow College of Magic. But instead, on the other side, they could see a sandy beach, waves lapping at the shore.

“Wh-What...?” Taclyde was rendered speechless.

“I connected the door to the Calgosi Coast using the spell Teleportation,” Flio explained. “What do you think? This way, we can get there no problem. Would that be useful for your summer camp?” If the children and their guardians wanted to go to the Calgosi Coast, Flio was simply happy to be of use.

Not only the guardians, but Taclyde and the rest of the faculty stared wide-eyed out the door, all at a loss for words.

I’ve never heard of a magic ussers good enough to create a Teleportation Portal with sssuch long range, even in the Dark Citadel! thought Nyt, swallowing. Cold sweat ran down her brow. Her snake tongue darted in and out in a fit of hyperactivity.

“A-Ahem!” Taclyde cleared his throat, returning to his senses before the rest of the room. “W-Well, then! I suppose with Mister Flio’s help, we can make it to the Calgosi Coast after all! Is everyone in favor?”

His words seemed to break through everyone’s shock. The guardians all started replying at once.

“Sounds great to me!”

“Thank you, Mister Flio!”

“Wow! That Mister Flio sure is a powerful wizard!”

The room burst into applause, graciously directed at Flio himself.

“O-Oh!” said Flio, demurring. “I just wanted to help, that’s all...”

“Ah, my lord husband...” Rys said, gazing dreamily at him as she applauded along with the rest of the room. “You’ve made everyone so happy. Oh!” she added, suddenly muttering to herself. “But if we’re going to the beach, I must

obtain a new swimsuit! One that my lord husband will enjoy...”

Some of the surrounding dads heard what she said. Fantasies began racing through their hearts.

R-Rys in a swimsuit?!

I can't miss that!

I'm going! Even if I have to miss work!



As the conference room rang out in yet another round of applause, Belianna watched from her seat in the back with wide eyes. Belianna was a current member of the Dark Army and an Infernal candidate. Her half sister Irystiel was half devil and half human, and was currently receiving an elementary education at the Houghtow College of Magic disguised as a demihuman. She was here in a similar disguise to act as her sister's guardian.

Th-That Flio human! she thought. *He's pretty damned incredible to cast a spell as damned powerful as that...* She stared at the portal Flio had created, muttering in awe as her cheeks became slightly red. She felt excited in a way she couldn't understand. It was vexing. *B-But... Why does looking at that damned man make my chest and face feel so damned hot?! The only other time I can remember feeling this way was when I was looking at the Wolf of Justice...*

It was no surprise that Belianna felt that way. For a while, in the days before the peace treaty between the Dark Army and the Magical Kingdom, any time the Dark Army sent forces to attack, they would be stymied by a mysterious man in a blue wolf mask—the Wolf of Justice. She herself had faced him in combat and been unable to land so much as a single blow on him. She'd come to respect him for his overwhelming strength, and over time those emotions transformed into infatuation. She had become a devoted and loving fan of the Wolf of Justice.

In fact, the Wolf of Justice was none other than Flio himself, but that bit of information was known to only a select few. Belianna, alas, was not among them.

As a somewhat over-obsessive fan of the Wolf of Justice, Belianna was of

course quite familiar with his height and weight and overall body shape. She must have subconsciously recognized that Flio's physique made him a dead ringer for the Wolf.

Damn it! Calm down! she thought, pressing a hand to her chest in a desperate effort to control her emotions. *Only the Wolf of Justice is worthy of my love!* But every time Flio entered her field of vision, her heart would start pounding again despite herself, and she was rendered powerless to stop it. All she could do was avert her eyes.

◇Houghtow City—Houghtow College of Magic◇

The day after the parent-teacher conference, the Houghtow College of Magic was unusually full of excitement.

Garyl was chatting with his classmates before the start of classes for the day when Salina came running up to him with a big smile on her face. She was neatly dressed in a miniskirt and tights, and practically bowled their classmates over as she approached. "Lord Garyl, have you heard the news? It seems that our destination for the summer camp will be the Calgosi Coast!"

"Yeah!" said Garyl, grinning back. "My mom and dad told me yesterday! I can't wait to go to the beach!"

A strange process happened in Salina's brain as she heard those words. Garyl's words progressively transformed from "I can't wait to go to the beach," to "I can't wait to go to the beach with you, Salina," to finally, "I can't wait to see you in a swimsuit, Salina!"

"Excuse me?!" Salina said, jumping in the air and blushing furiously at the words she imagined Garyl saying to her. "Lord Garyl, you wish to see me in a swimsuit?!"

Garyl just kept on grinning. "I bet everyone's gonna have loads of fun!"

Salina, however, sidled up to him, her eyes turning heart-shaped as she brought her face almost close enough to touch his. "As you wish!" she said. "Your beloved Salina will do everything she can to meet your expectations!"

Garyl's smile was undisturbed. One of his classmates, the lizardfolk Reptor, glanced over from the side. Reptor was wearing a somewhat showy outfit

stylized to make him look like a cool adventurer. “Garyl’s something else...” he said, grimacing. “I would have run away long ago...”

“I-I’d cry, I think...” said Leina Raina, a human girl in a blue dress, currently hiding timidly behind Reptor.

As Salina was in the midst of her rather frenetic attempt to appeal to Garyl, a girl dressed in a black gothic lolita-style dress pitter-pattered her way over. She was holding a plush black cat in her hands, which she shoved in Salina’s face.

“I think you’re bothering Sir Garyl...” she said, using the cat as a proxy. She made its mouth move and projected her voice through it like a ventriloquist. “Perhaps you had better stop.”

Salina furrowed her brows, agitated at the interference in her attempt to woo the man of her dreams. She glared directly at the girl holding the cat—Irystiel. “Excuse me for a moment, Irystiel,” she said. “You are interrupting my precious rendezvous with Lord Garyl.”

Irystiel puffed out her cheeks, determinedly interposing her cat plush between herself and Salina. “Irystiel thinks you are bothering Sir Garyl!” the cat declared.

“Nnngh!” Salina grumbled.

“Grrr!” the cat snapped back.

“Hey, get along, you two!” said Garyl, smiling brightly as he clapped both girls on the shoulders. “Anyway, the teacher’s gonna be here soon. Let’s call it here for today, all right?”

“Y-Yes, Lord Garyl!” Salina clapped both hands in front of her mouth and her fury towards Irystiel seemed to vanish—she gave Garyl a perfectly proper smile.

“If you say so, Sir Garyl, Irystiel will try to get along with her too...” Irystiel held the plush up to her own face. She tilted her head towards the shoulder Garyl had touched, blushing softly.

Just then another boy walked up—Sadjita, who had known Salina since they were both very small. “Hey Salina!” he demanded. “What’s with all this ‘ooh, Lord Garyl and I are of one heart and body, promised to each other in a

previous life' crap or whatever?! *I'm* the one you're promised to, remember?!" He jammed his thumb at himself demonstratively. "Our parents made an agreement! You and I are going to get married as soon as we're old enough! So c'mon! Stop spending time with Garyl and pay attention to me!"

Sadjita's clothes marked him out immediately as a child of nobility. He posed dramatically as he spoke as well. And yet...

"Wait..." Sadjita said. "Huh?!"

A second ago, a number of students, including Salina and Irystiel, had been gathered around Garyl's desk. But now they were all back in their own chairs, dutifully facing the blackboard. And there, at the front of the class, was the offensive magic teacher Oryou, here to begin their lessons. She had entered the class while Sadjita had been in the middle of his speech.

Everyone else had returned to their desks, but Sadjita had been too busy posing to notice the teacher walking into the room.

"...Oh." He froze mid-pose next to Garyl's seat.

A sinister smile crossed Oryou's face as her eyes met his. "Sadjita..." she said. "Care to explain what exactly you're doing? Class is starting, so get to your seat!" Oryou was from the far east and spoke with an accent that she didn't bother trying to hide.

"A-Ah! S-Sorry!" Sadjita abandoned his pose and scampered back to his seat as fast as possible while titters of laughter filled the classroom from every direction.

When Sadjita was back in his seat, Elinàsze, the class representative, started the beginning-of-school formalities, calling the class to attention in a loud voice. "All rise!"

The students stood as one. It looked like another chaotic day of school for Class A.

◇Houghtow College of Magic—Administrative Office◇

School was out for the day. After the day's closing ceremonies were over, the lower-grade students made their way out of school, and Oryou and Taclyde sat

down in the administrative office.

“Miss Oryou...” said Taclyde, looking at the stack of papers Oryou—the head of the lower-grade classes—had brought him. “What should we do?”

“Perhaps we could decide on a set number of guardians to help with the preliminary inspection, and decide by lottery?”

“That’s easy enough to say, but there are *dozens* of applicants here! It’s like every single parent sent in an application!” Taclyde was starting to sweat as he glanced over the sheer number of them. “Perhaps we could discuss with Mister Flio whether or not to increase the number of participants...”

Taclyde went to leave the room, but Oryou chased after him. “I’ll go with you, in that case. I am in charge of the lower grades, after all.”

“Oh? Are you sure that’s the only reason? I seem to recall that you like to make me do this kind of busywork.”

“I simply wish to accompany you, as the teacher in charge of the lower grades,” Oryou responded, drawing closer to Taclyde. “And perhaps, afterwards, we can enjoy a drink together.”

“I’m still waiting on my pay this month,” said Taclyde. “You’re paying for your own this time.”

“How cruel the world is! You should have said it was your treat, even if it was a lie!”

“Fine, fine! It’s my treat, I say, lying.”

“Leave out that last part!”

The two teased each other as they made their way out of the school.

Belano watched them go from the hallway with envy in her eyes. *I wish I had a handsome man draped over me like that...* she thought, blushing and puffing out her cheeks. As was usually the case in times like this, Flio’s face came unbidden to her mind. But something was wrong.

H-Huh? Flio’s face in Belano’s mind looked quite a bit younger than usual. *Huh? Huh?! I-Is that...Minilio?!?!?!?*

A look of shock passed over Belano's face when she realized. It wasn't Flio, but Minilio, the magic doll Flio had made, who had appeared in her mind at that moment.

Huuuuh?! Wh-Why would I think of Minilio's face of all people at a time like this?! I-I mean, he does look like Lord Flio except younger... And he looks just like Lord Flio when he uses his magic to make himself look grown up... And he helps me to my feet when I trip over myself, and he always heals me with magic when I get all stressed and throw up...

Belano clutched her head in confusion as her cheeks turned redder and redder.

◇Houghtow City—Houghtow College of Magic◇

A few days later, school was out for break. A group of nearly twenty lower-grade students and their guardians was assembled in front of the school gates. Each one of them was here to help with the preliminary inspection for the summer camp they were holding later that day.

Earlier, when Oryou and Taclyde had shown up at the Fli-o'-Rys General Store to consult with him, Flio had just smiled his usual easygoing smile and said, "That's fine. I can teleport as many as would like to come."

"But..." Taclyde had protested. "Almost every guardian sent in an application..."

"Perhaps we should hold the summer camp twice, for two different groups?" Oryou proposed. In the end, they divided the guardians and students into ten groups by lot.

Taclyde smirked wryly as he looked over the assembled guardians. "Hardly anyone wanted to help out when we were going to Mt. Kino, but the moment we change the destination to the Calgosi Coast it's like this. Well, ordinarily, it would take a carriage almost half a year to make a round trip that far. I suppose I understand how they feel..."

Nyt, who was standing beside Taclyde wearing a large pair of sunglasses, folded her arms. "Hss..." she said. "Sso, ssstudents in the Magical Kingdom do

thisss sort of thing as well...” As the newest teacher, she was here assisting Tacyde. “I don’t mind helping out if assked, but...”

Nyt turned her gaze to one spot in the crowd, where Flio, Rys, Garyl, and Elinàsze were all chatting happily. *Wh-Why musst I be in a group with Fenrysss?* she thought. *I’ve disguissed myself as a demihuman and found a job... If my identity were to be revealed now, I might lossse everything...* She turned to face a different direction, but behind her sunglasses, her eyes were fixated on Rys.

As she was engrossed in her worries, Zarmas walked up to her. Zarmas had been her aide in the Dark Army. Back then she had used the name Helzarmas, but she shortened it when she got a job at the Houghtow College of Magic along with Nyt.

“Lady Nyt,” Zarmas reported. “The preparations are complete.” She was carrying three large backpacks on her back and holding four overfull bags in each hand. And yet, despite the absurd load she was carrying, she seemed completely unperturbed. Zarmas looked like a dainty and elegant lady, but her arm and leg strength were unparalleled among Nyt’s soldiers. It was only to be expected, as she was a true champion. Even so...

“H-Hey! Check out that lady teacher!”

“She’s carrying that much luggage, and she looks completely fine!”

The parents stared and gasped in surprise at the spectacle.

“Hasss something unsssettled them, Zarmasss?” Nyt asked, glancing at the crowd.

“Surely it’s just your imagination,” said Zarmas, flatly.

“I sssee...” Nyt nodded.

“Nonetheless, Lady Nyt,” Zarmas went on, “schools in the Magical Kingdom are quite peculiar, aren’t they? A trip to the beach to increase camaraderie... It doesn’t seem at all the most efficacious course of action. In my experience, camaraderie is best raised by eating and drinking together...and raising hell, of course.”

“Yesss,” said Nyt. “I agree.” *And yet...* she thought, a bitter memory bubbling up in her mind. When Yuigarde had just become Dark One, he had taken his subordinates on a trip to the hot springs to build camaraderie. But Yuigarde had made a terrible scene and gotten them all kicked out, banned from the springs for life.

We were in disguisse at the time, of coursse, so they can’t possssibly enforce it... she thought. *But thanksss to that scene Yuigarde made, our camaraderie wasss lower than ever...* She shook her head, trying to rid herself of the unpleasant memories. “Incidentally, Zarmasss,” she said, turning to face her underling.

“Yes? What is it, Lady Nyt?”

“You sssaid the beach would not be efficacious, no?”

“I did say that. Why?” Zarmas replied.

Nyt glanced over Zarmas’s body. She was carrying a veritable mountain of luggage, but instead of her usual athletic jersey, she was wearing a bikini under a white parka. “Nonethelessss, you ssseem to be in the ssspirit of thingsss.”

“If you will permit me, Lady Nyt, perhaps you have heard the aphorism, ‘when in Klyrode, do as the Klyrodians do.’ For that reason, I have put my personal misgivings aside. Yes, for that reason alone.”

“And that’sss the *only* reassson?”

“Yes. I have no personal interest in the beach at all.” Zarmas’s face was unflinching.

“I sssee...” Nyt could think of nothing more to say.



“Nyt and Zarmas seem as close as ever,” said Rys. She was watching them from where she stood next to Flio, a smile on her face.

“Speaking of,” said Flio, “those two are old friends of yours, aren’t they?”

“Yes, we were colleagues in the Dark Ar—I mean, in my previous workplace.” Although the Dark Army and the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode were now nominally at peace, cultural exchange between the humans and demihumans

on one side and the demons on the other was still minimal. That was why Rys, Ghozal, Nyt, and Zarmas all disguised themselves as demihumans while they lived in the Magical Kingdom, and hid their true identities as demons.

“Maybe you should go introduce yourself,” suggested Flio.

“Ah...” Rys pondered. “But she’s been stealing glances at me for a while now. I think she might not want anyone to know that we know each other...”

Taclyde ran up, interrupting their conversation. “It looks like everyone’s here, Mister Flio,” he said. “Ready to get started?”

“Oh!” Flio said. “Yes, one second. Let’s use that door over there.” Flio stepped up to the entrance to a nearby storeroom. The students’ eyes sparkled as they watched, whispering to each other.

“I heard that dad guy’s gonna take us all to the beach with some kinda crazy magic!”

“Is there gonna be an angel? Or maybe flowers!”

“Nah! I bet there’s gonna be a biiiiiig blast of lighting that’ll shatter the whole earth!”

Flio glanced at the gossiping students. *Hmm... he thought, grimacing. What to do...? I don’t want to disappoint them...*

“Er...” said Taclyde. “You can just do it your usual way.”

“Thank you,” Flio said, smirking. “That’s a relief.” He walked up to the storeroom and held out his arm, chanting a short incantation. A magic circle appeared and rotated, vanishing into the doorway. “All right, they’re connected!” Flio opened the door, revealing a shoreline stretching as far as the eyes could see. The students and guardians murmured with excitement.

“Whoa!” a kid exclaimed. “It’s connected! Just like that! It was kinda boring, but it was really amazing!”

“He did it in a second! Like it was easy! It was kinda boring, though,” said another.

“Holy crap! I’ve never seen anything that cool in my life! Even if it was kinda boring...” a third piped in.

Is it just my imagination...? Flio wondered, wincing as the crowd raised their arms in a big cheer. *I feel like everyone keeps saying my spell was boring...*

The group went to go through the storeroom door, which now led to the Calgosi Coast far to the south, but when Flio looked inside, his eyes widened in shock. “Huh?!”

On the other side of the door, a giant man with a long white beard and long white hair was locked in combat with a giant squid monster.

Bang! Bang! Bang! A volley of cannon fire rang out from the pirate ships surrounding the giant. Meanwhile, an enormous rukh flew through the skies, accompanied by a woman who seemed to be flying using magic. They did their best to knock the cannonballs out of the sky, but there were simply too many. A few of them breached their defenses and scored direct hits on the giant. Others veered off course, striking the road that ran along the sea cliff and coming down on the carriages and wagons traveling along it.

Just then, a dark-skinned girl came running up to the door. “Huh? There didn’t used to be a door here, right?”

Flio smiled when he saw who it was. “Well, if it isn’t Rolindeim, from Junia Van Biel’s house!”

“Y-Yes...?” Rolindeim said, startled to hear her name spoken. She looked, and grinned when she saw Flio. “Wait! You’re Lord Flio! Right?” she said, tackling him affectionately.

Not bothering to remove Rolindeim from himself, Flio stepped through the portal to the Calgosi Coast. “I’m not sure what exactly is happening,” he said. “But those pirate ships look like they’re causing problems with those cannons of theirs. Should I get rid of them?”

“Y-Yeah,” said Rolindeim, dangling from Flio’s shoulders. “That’d be great, right? But there’s just too many of them! There’s no way!”

“I don’t know,” said Flio. “I think I can manage.” He gave Rolindeim one of his easygoing smiles and raised his arm in the direction of the pirate ships, just as they unleashed another volley at the giant. The next second, the cannonballs

vanished into thin air without a trace.

“H-Huh?” Rolindeim’s eyes went wide.

A second later, the pirate ships were gone as well.

“Huh?” repeated Rolindeim. “H-Huh?!” Her eyes were already wide, but they opened even wider.

All that was left on the beach was the white-haired giant and the giant squid, still locked in combat. But a second later, the squid seemed to realize that the supporting cannon fire was gone. Then she noticed that the pirate ships had vanished as well. And after that, she noticed that she was surrounded, with the rukh on one side and the magic-using girl on the other. She pulled out a white flag from somewhere and waved it vigorously.

“Surrendering, eh?” the giant bellowed, flexing his muscles. “No match for the great Polseidon after all, I see! Gah ha ha!” The rukh flew circles around his head.

“You should have contacted me if the pirates were back!” Flio said. “I could have driven them away for you easily!”

“What’s that, whippersnapper?” said Polseidon.

“What’s that, old man?” said the rukh avian Loplantz, still in his rukh form.

The sorceress, meanwhile, flew up to Flio. “L-Lord Flio...” she stuttered. “Th-Thank you...” This was Junia Van Biel. It seemed that conversational skills were still something of a weak point for her.

Flio smiled, as affable as ever. “I’m just glad you’re safe,” he said. “Who *were* those pirates? I get the sense that was a different group from Eddsarch’s men...”

“A-Ah. Y-Yes... They were...d-demons...from the D-Dark Army. They d-don’t like th-the idea of peace with the M-Magical K-Kingdom... S-So they’re...rampaging around...”

Taclyde folded his arms and furrowed his brow at the conversation he overheard. “Demons on a rampage...” He sighed. “Maybe we should rethink the trip to the Calgosi Coast. The students’ safety takes priority, after all...”

“Lady Nyt...” Zarmas said, stepping forward. “Permission to deploy? I will be back in a few minutes.” Not even waiting for an answer, she left her pile of luggage on a nearby sand dune and ran off at top speed, kicking up sand left and right. In a second, she was gone. And then, a few minutes later, she was back, carrying a great pile of people on her shoulders.

“I’m sorry for the delay,” Zarmas said. “These are the demons who have been rampaging along the Calgosi Coast. I believe I have all of them.” She tossed them unceremoniously on the sand. Most of them were bound up tight with rope, but some of them were just unconscious.

Zarmas dragged one of the demons—a muscular man who looked like their leader—up by the throat and held him out before Flio and Junia. “Tell them what you told me,” she said, her voice without emotion.

The leader gurgled before answering. “I-I’m really sorry for the trouble we made...” he said. “I promise to change my ways and work for the good of the coast. Please! Forgive me!” It seemed like that was all he could manage. His airflow restricted by Zarmas’s strong arms, he lost consciousness.

Zarmas regarded him coldly. “So he says,” she said. “I believe you will find that I have *persuaded* the demons who were running rampant along the coast. They’ll be good from now on.” She turned to look at Taclyde. “Administrator Taclyde, I have removed the obstacle standing in the way of the realization of your summer camp. Is this satisfactory?”

“Huh?” Taclyde said, snapping out of his stunned stupor. “W-Well...I suppose, as long as the pirates are gone, everything’s fine? Yeah...” He nodded his head many, many times.

“Excellent,” said Zarmas. “Then all is well.”

Zarmasss... Nyt thought to herself, smirking as she looked over the scene. You wanted to play in the ocean after all, didn’t you...? But how did you beat up sso many demonsss sso quickly?

Flio, meanwhile, was watching Zarmas with an expression of awe. *I used Teleportation to send those demons pretty far away from the coast... he thought. She brought them all back in just that amount of time...and on foot? Miss Zarmas must be in incredible shape...*

The students seemed to be of a like mind. They were shaking with fear and whispering to each other.

“Whoa... Miss Zarmas is something else...”

“Do you think she’ll do that to us?”

“I-I’m not about to find out! I’ll do whatever Miss Zarmas says from now on!”

“Me too!”



Polseidon (back in his human-sized form) and Junia took the demons Zarmas had rounded up to the dungeon underneath the Van Biel mansion.

“Gah ha ha!” Polseidon laughed as he carried in one unconscious demon after another. “I’m gonna train you good and proper to be loyal subjects of Countess Van Biel!”

“Th-Thank you, Polseidon...” said Junia.

“Of course, Countess! Leave it to me!”

Junia left affairs in the prison to Polseidon and came to offer some words to Flio. “I-I’m s-sorry to make you wait, Lord Flio. M-May I ask...wh-what b-brings you to the Calgosi Coast t-today? I-It seems like you’ve b-brought a lot of p-people I haven’t...s-seen before...”

Junia Van Biel suffered from terrible social anxiety. Droplets of nervous sweat were forming on her brow as she watched the students and their guardians stroll up and down the beach.

“Well, actually,” Flio said, “I’m helping out with a summer camp put on by my children’s school, the Houghtow College of Magic. They wanted to visit the Calgosi Coast, if it’s not too much of an imposition...”

Taclyde, who was standing next to Flio, bowed deeply before the countess. “I’m terribly sorry to show up so suddenly with such a huge crowd of people,” he said. “My name is Taclyde, administrator at the Houghtow College of Magic. The children very much wanted to have their summer camp here. I hope you don’t mind?”

The sight of Taclyde—a stranger—bowing to her made Junia freeze up for a moment. But she took a deep breath, calmed her nerves, and faced him head-on. “Th-That’s no problem at all,” she said. “Everyone who lives near here uses the beach. Even people from central Klyrode come to visit. I want as many people to enjoy the beach as possible...”

Junia held out her hand. In it was a piece of paper, with the words “Permission to use Calgosi Coast Beach” written on the top. She took a pen out of her inner pocket and signed the form before handing it over to Taclyde.

“M-My estate will cover lodging and food...” she said. “W-We’ll arrange everything. F-For free, of course...”

“What?” Taclyde objected. “That can’t be right...”

“O-Oh,” said Junia. “N-No, i-it’s just free th-this time. W-We’ll charge a f-fee next year... B-But we hope... We hope you’ll keep visiting f-for a long time.”

“Oh, I see!” said Taclyde. “So that’s how it is!” Taclyde handed the permission slip and offered Junia his hand. Junia fearfully reached out to shake it.

Junia Van Biel was engaged and eager to help, and her preliminary meeting with Taclyde for the summer camp went off without any further hitches.

◇The Calgosi Coast—Half an Hour Later◇

“I don’t accept this... I don’t accept this... I don’t accept this...” Zarmas muttered the same words to herself over and over again, as if she was casting a curse.

A moment ago, she had removed a large beach parasol from the mountain of luggage she’d brought and planted it in the sand. “Time to get started on my inspection of the beach!” she declared when Taclyde suddenly reappeared.

“The meeting’s finished!” he said. “It’s time to go back for the day!”

Zarmas had been forced to pack the beach parasol back up and follow the rest of the group to the meeting point, in shock the whole time.

But I wanted to play in the ocean... she thought. She was so dispirited that she didn’t even say anything to Nyth herself.

As Flio conjured a portal back home, he glanced over at the very depressed-looking Zarmas. “Mister Taclyde...” he said. “I can make the portal whenever I want, you know. We can let them have some fun first.”

“Oh, well, you know...” said Taclyde, wincing and scratching the back of his head. “I’d love to do that, but this trip really was just supposed to be for getting things ready for the summer camp. And we decided who was going to participate by lot. If word got out that we had fun before going home, the parents and students who didn’t get to come might complain...”

Negotiations had gone so smoothly that they ended up spending almost no time on the beach. There was a fair bit of grumbling, but Zarmas obeyed in the end and quietly returned to the Houghtow College of Magic. That seemed to do the trick.

“I’m not gonna complain to Miss Zarmas... She beat up all those pirates!”

“We’ll go home quietly...”

“This isn’t the main event, after all!”

◇A Sea Cliff near the Calgosi Coast◇

Not long after Flio returned everyone to the Houghtow College of Magic, on the sea cliff near where Junia Van Biel had fought the demon pirates, three sopping wet figures crawled out of the surf.

“*Hahh... Hahh...* Wh-What in the devil’s name just happened...?!” The Shadow King collapsed on the cliff, dressed in tattered rags that had once been a luxurious outfit. He was gasping for breath like he had pushed himself far past his limit swimming through the turbulent waves.

Beside him, Kintsuno the Gold and Gintsuno the Silver, also dressed in the tattered rags of their dresses, had collapsed on their hands and knees, gasping for breath as well. “Y-You’re...asking *us*...?!” yipped Kintsuno.

“W-We were just on our way to a grand old time at Calgosi...” said Gintsuno. “Enjoying fine liquor and luxury dining in our carriage... When suddenly there was a terrible noise... And our carriage was plummeting down the cliff...”

Perhaps an explanation is in order. Not long ago, Junia Van Biel and the demon pirates had been locked in a fierce battle. They had opened fire on Polseidon in his giant form, and although Loplanz and Junia had done their best to deflect the cannonballs, some of them had scored hits. But some of them had also missed wildly, raining down on the road running along the sea cliff. One of them happened to impact the Shadow King and fox sisters' carriage.

"At least we escaped with our lives..." the Shadow King said. "But our possessions...!"

"It's all at the bottom of the sea..." lamented Kintsuno.

"Ahhh!" Gintsuno cried. "Our luxurious vacation, ruined!"

The three gazed wordlessly off at the ocean, but their carriage and possessions had both been swallowed by the waves. There was nothing to be seen.

◇The Calgosi Coast—Later◇

The lower-grade students of the Houghtow College of Magic arrived back at Calgosi Coast, along with their teachers and guardians.

"Welcome to Calgosi Coast! We'll be your hosts today, right? I'm Rolindeim."

"I'm Polseidon!"

"And I'm Loplanz! The three of us will be showing you around!"

The guests from the Houghtow College of Magic, almost three hundred in total, were lined up in front of these three. They listened as Rolindeim, Polseidon, and Loplanz took turns explaining the rules.

In the guardians' line, Rys leaned over to whisper into Flio's ear. "Do you see Countess Van Biel anywhere, my lord husband?" she asked. "I hope nothing's the matter..."

"Countess Van Biel is in charge of governing the whole Calgosi region," Flio said. "Something might have come up..."

"Yes, I suppose that could be the case..." Rys nodded, seemingly convinced.

But privately, Flio wasn't so sure. *It isn't just that she's too afraid to be seen*

by this many strangers...is it?

◇Meanwhile, at the Van Biel Manor◇

In a bedroom on the second story of the Van Biel manor, Junia Van Biel was under the covers, sheet pulled over her head, her body shaking furiously.

“Ohhh...” she moaned. “I-I-I c-c-can’t! I j-j-just can’t! I c-c-can’t stand the thought of *h-h-hundreds* of s-strangers looking at me...”

◇ ◇ ◇

Rolindeim, Polseidon, and Loplantz led the guests from the Houghtow College of Magic to a part of the beach that was good for swimming so that they could enjoy a bit of unscheduled time.

“At last, we get to swim!” Salina cheered. She hurriedly changed into her swimsuit and stepped out onto the sandy hill, surveying the area. She had bought a new, white, one-piece swimsuit with an exposed back just for today.

I’m going to use this swimsuit to beguile my beloved Lord Garyl! she thought. *O, my Lord Garyl... Wherever could you be?*

A boy stepped up behind her as she was lost in thought. “L-Lord Garyl?” Salina said, turning around, a great big smile on her face.

It was Sadjita. “H-Hey, Salina...” he said, smiling shyly. “Th-That swimsuit looks good on you...”

“Oh. You’re not Lord Garyl.” Salina’s smile vanished. She sighed dejectedly and went back to surveying the area.

“H-Hey!” Sadjita said, stepping in front of Salina as she turned away. “I complimented your swimsuit! Are you not gonna thank me?!”

“Please don’t bother me,” said Salina, masterfully keeping Sadjita out of her field of vision. “I’m busy searching for Lord Garyl.”

“Those two sure are close...” said Reptor, smirking knowingly as he looked over at Salina and Sadjita.

“Are they?” asked Leina Raina, tilting her head dubiously. “To me, it looks like they’re fighting...”

Irystiel walked along behind Reptor and Leina, wearing a frilly black swimsuit and clutching the black cat plush she used as a proxy to speak. “Irystiel thinks they argue so much because they like each other,” the cat said.

“Oh! I see...” said Reptor.

“When you put it that way, I guess it makes sense...” agreed Leina.

Just then, Garyl burst forth from the changing area. “Yeah!” he cheered, charging off towards the water. “Swimming! Let’s go!”

“Ah?! L-Lord Garyl!” Salina’s smile reappeared the moment she spotted him. She ran off in a chase, but she wasn’t the only one.

“It’s Garyl!”

“Garyl! Come swim with me!”

“Let’s swim together, Garyl!”

“Do you want to get something to eat at one of the stalls first?”

A great crowd of girls had finished changing and started milling about the beach. When they spotted Garyl, they all began to mob around him.

“Oh, no!” cried Salina. “I-I knew there were other girls in my class who had their eyes on Lord Garyl, but *this many*?!” The crowd was blocking her way, preventing her from getting close to Garyl. She stomped her feet in irritation, but she wasn’t about to give up. She took off towards Garyl once more, running as fast as she could. Then, Elinàsze suddenly appeared, wearing a light yellow one-piece swimsuit, and Salina nearly collided with her.

“Now, now, Garyl!” Elinàsze scolded her brother, sighing in exasperation. “You haven’t done your warm-up exercises yet!”

As she spoke, Irystiel, Reptor, and Leina Raina stepped up to her. Those three (plus Salina) were Garyl’s friends in class, but they also got along well with his sister Elinàsze.

“Let’s do our warm-ups together!” Reptor proposed.

“Of course, Reptor!” said Elinàsze. “I’d be happy to!”

“M-May I join?” asked Leina.

“Of course you may! We’re friends, aren’t we?” said Elinàsze.

“Irystiel would like to do warm-ups with you as well...if that’s okay...” said Irystiel’s plush cat.

“Of course she may, Kitty!” said Elinàsze, addressing the cat directly.

Smiling, the four stood in a circle and began chanting together as they did their exercises: “One, two! One, two!”

As the kids were busy warming up, Flio and Rys, who had finished using the adults’ changing room, stepped up to them.

“I see you’re doing your warm-up exercises, Elinàsze,” said Flio.

“Oh! Hello, papa! Hello, mama!” Elinàsze stopped what she was doing and ran up to greet her parents.

“Shall we join them and do some warm-up exercises ourselves?” Flio asked, turning towards Rys.

Rys smiled and nodded. “I would love to, my lord husband.”

The four children and two adults stood in a circle, chanting together as they stretched in time. “One, two! One, two!”

“And one, and two!” Rys was chanting cheerfully, putting her whole body into the exercises. She bent forward, exposing her cleavage, and shook her body, causing her generous bosom to wobble hypnotically. The parents stared at her, but Rys didn’t seem to notice as she moved on to the next exercise.

I really lucked out, didn’t I...? Flio thought, struggling to tear his eyes away from his wife’s chest as he did his own exercises.

Garyl went off to swim, splitting the crowd into two groups: the children, who followed him to the ocean, and the parents, who lingered behind for another look at Rys.



Their warm-ups complete, Elinàsze, Irystiel, and Leina Raina ran over to a spot in the sea cliff that had been carved out to use as a water slide. Seawater gushed out from the top, flowing down the slide back to the sea below.

“Eeeeeee!!!” The three slid down, shrieking with joy. The slide snaked to the left and right, eliciting an elated cry each time. And at the end, it dropped them into the ocean with a loud splash and a great spray of water.

“Pwah! This is fun!” Elinàsze exclaimed, a great smile on her face as she surfaced.

“L-Let’s go again! Can we?” Leina asked happily.

“Irystiel would like to go again as well,” said Irystiel’s plush, held up to her face, which she had brought swimming with her.

Laughing and smiling, the girls made their way back up to the start. The water slide was popular—there was a long line leading to the top, overseen by Rolindeim and Loplanz.

They lined up just as Garyl, Reptor, and Sadjita were using the slide.

“Yahooooo!” cried Garyl.

“Yaaaaahooooo!” cried Reptor.

“Yaaaaaaahhhh?!” shrieked Sadjita.

A crowd of students hurried to look, gathering in places where they could see Garyl sliding down. Some of the girls even tried to swim up to the foot of the slide to try to catch Garyl as he came down, but Polseidon put a quick stop to that.

“Hey, keep away from there! People are gonna come flying off that thing! It’s dangerous!” He interposed his muscular body, stopping the girls from getting close.

Splash! Splash! Splash! Splash! The three boys reached the end of the waterfall...but there were *four* splashes of water.

“Hm?” Polseidon said, looking over his shoulders. “Were there four splashes just now? I could have sworn only three kids were on the slide...”

Garyl’s face emerged from the water, but something was off—Wyne was draped over his shoulders! “Pfah!!!” She spat out a mouthful of water. “That was *fun*, Gare-Gare!”

“Wh-What?! Big sis Wyne?! What are you doing here?!” Garyl seemed just as surprised as anyone. After all, Wyne was supposed to have been watching the house.



◇Flio's House—Meanwhile◇

"Wh-What have I done?!" Tanya stood in the living room of Flio's house, clutching her head in pain.

Flio had asked Tanya to make sure Wyne didn't try to fly after them. The Calgosi Coast was a considerable distance away, but Wyne was a fast-enough flier to reach it in no time at all, so Flio felt it was necessary to take some precautions.

Wyne had been in the living room eating an entire cake when Tanya had stepped out of the room for just a second. But when she got back, Wyne was gone without a trace. Tanya searched every corner of the house, but there was no sign of her anywhere.

"What have I done...?" she repeated. "I only stepped out long enough to prepare a magic beast to be cooked! I thought it would be safe! Lord Flio... I have failed you!"

◇Back at the Calgosi Coast◇

Wyne grinned, her body draped over Garyl's shoulders.

"I *thought* I felt something heavy on my back halfway down the slide!" Garyl laughed. "So it was you, sis!" Grinning, he stepped out of the water, only for a shriek-like sound to erupt from the crowd. "Huh? What's that about?" Garyl cocked his head. He looked around and noticed that people were looking at something behind him in horror. Garyl looked over his shoulder.

"Mm?" said Wyne, holding tight to Garyl's arm as they ran along. Her body was completely and utterly naked. "What's wrong, Gare-Gare? Let's go again! Again!"

"B-Big sis Wyne!" Garyl exclaimed. "Wh-Where are your clothes?!"

"Huh? What? Where are they? Hmm..." Wyne folded her arms and thought. "I have no idea!"

"N-No idea...?"

"Who cares about that! Let's go! Slide! Slide!" Still naked, Wyne ran along, grinning wildly.

“Wait! B-Big sis! Stop!” Garyl shouted, trying his best to stop his sister.

“Huh?!” Elinàsze, who had been waiting in line, ran over when she saw what was happening. “Big sis Wyne?! And you’re *naked*?!”

Loplanz heard the commotion and went to see what was wrong. “What’s happening over— Wait! W-Wyne?! Is that you?!” he shouted, running even faster when he saw who it was.

“Hey, Lo-Lo!” Wyne said, running up to him when she noticed he was there. They were acquaintances, after all. “Long time no see!”

“Wait! Wyne! Wh-Wh-Why are you naked?! B-Bwahhh!” His face turned bright red as blood gushed out of his nose at the sight of Wyne naked in front of him.

Wyne’s arrival had thrown the water slide into chaos.

◇The Calgosi Coast—The Road to the Beach◇

It was lunchtime, and the visitors from the Houghtow College of Magic were gathered along a road lined with food stalls on either side. Students, guardians, and staff could all eat whatever they wanted for free. Everywhere you looked, there were long lines made up entirely of people from the school.

Flio, Rys, Wyne, Garyl, and Elinàsze walked along together double file. “Wyne,” Rys scolded her oldest daughter, “I *told* you to be a good girl and wait for us at the house.”

“Ah ha ha!” Wyne laughed, taking a big bite from the large serving of noodles she was eating. “Sorry, mama. But I *really* wanted to see Gare-Gare and Eli-Eli!” She was looking around at everyone between bites, happy to be with her family.

“Oh, I can’t stay angry at you when you smile like that...” Rys said. “But promise me you’ll keep your word next time, okay, Wyne?”

“Mmh,” Wyne answered, cheeks stuffed full of noodles. “Mmkay.”

Flio smiled wryly. “Speaking of promises, Wyne, you know you’re not supposed to talk with your mouth full.”

Wyne nodded in response, carefully making sure not to speak. Her smile was

as bright as ever.

Wyne really loves her family... Flio thought, smiling back as he looked at her face.

“You really surprised me, Wyne, showing up on my back suddenly like that!” said Garyl, smirking as he ate a large skewer of meat. “And I was even *more* surprised when I realized you were naked!”

“Ah ha ha!” Wyne laughed, wrapping her arm around Garyl’s shoulder. “You looked like you were having so much fun! I couldn’t help myself!”

“It’s not funny, big sis Wyne!” said Elinàsze, brow furrowed in anger as she ate her grilled fish. “And you mustn’t throw your clothes away like that! You’re lucky they got caught in that tree so I could get them for you with flight magic! If they had ended up in the ocean, we might *never* have found them!”

“Ah ha ha!” Wyne laughed, wrapping her other arm around Elinàsze’s shoulder. “Thanks for getting me my clothes back. I love you, Eli-Eli!”

“S-Sis!” Garyl protested. “I’m gonna drop my food!”

“Ah ha ha! I love you too, Gare-Gare! I love you both!”

Garyl and Elinàsze grimaced as Wyne pulled them along. They were the very image of close siblings.

Flio and Rys watched from behind, smiling. “Wyne really loves her brother and sister, doesn’t she?” mused Flio.

“Yes,” said Rys. “She really does.”

The family continued down the road, smiles on everyone’s face.

◇Houghtow College of Magic—Meanwhile◇

“Excuse me?” The Maiden Queen of Klyrode’s eyes shot open when she stepped inside the Houghtow College of Magic meeting room. She had come here as part of her inspection of the kingdom, to visit its just-opened lower-grades division.

In front of her was Waona, who taught summoning for the college’s adult students. She was sitting there, facing the queen, wiping the profuse sweat

from her brow with a handkerchief.

“I-I’m terribly sorry, Your Majesty...” said Waona. “The lower-grade students are away right now on a one-night camping trip to the Calgosi Coast with their guardians. By the time we heard you were coming, everything was already set in stone...”

“Oh, no, you don’t need to apologize!” the Queen said, putting a big fake smile on her face and shaking her head. “I didn’t send a message ahead of time because I wanted to see your undisturbed daily operations!”

A one-night camping trip...she thought. I suppose I won’t have an opportunity to see Garyl, even if I were to stop by Lord Flio’s house...

Garyl had once saved the Maiden Queen when she was attacked by a demon. It left a very gallant impression of the young boy in her mind. In fact, she had become quite infatuated. Garyl was growing up quickly because of his mother’s demonic blood. He was already starting to look like a handsome young man.

It would take an entire week for the witches I brought with me to create a portal all the way to the Calgosi Coast... she thought, determined not to let her disappointment show on her face as she carried on her conversation with Waona.

◇Evening on the Calgosi Coast◇

The sun had set halfway past the horizon. A number of people had gathered to watch, including Nyt, who was sitting under a parasol tucked away in a corner of the beach.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!!!” Suddenly, Zarmas appeared over the crest of a sandy hill, running with ferocious speed.

Nyt sighed, following Zarmas with her eyes as she ran. “I can’t believe *thisss* wasss why she wanted to go to the beach sssso badly...”

They had been in Calgosi for almost a day, and Zarmas had spent the time doing nothing but running up and down the beach. On her face was a look of absolute joy.

Although, now that I think about it, she’sss alwaysss loved running about like

an idiot, Nyt thought, sighing deeply as she remembered some of Zarmas's antics from their time in the Dark Army.

Zarmas didn't stop running even as the sun vanished from sight.

◇The Calgosi Coast—An Inn, After Dark◇

The summer camp schedule included a magic class, with parents observing. After dinner, they gathered in the inn's main hall, which had been set up as a classroom. The guardians sat in the back for an opportunity to sit in and see how their children were being taught. Class A's lesson was defensive magic, taught in the middle of the hall.

Belano, the defensive magic teacher, stood in front of the class with a portable blackboard. The students were sitting in rows, but they were all quite tired. Some of them had started to nod off, while others were already sound asleep, heads buried in their arms. Garyl's head wobbled occasionally while the ever-serious Elinàsze kept smacking her cheeks to keep herself from falling asleep.

Houghtow City was almost at the very center of the continent. Most of the students were born and raised there. For almost all of them, and their guardians as well, it was their first time seeing the ocean. It had been a day full of excitement, up until dinner, when they finally expended their energy. They were in no state to be taking classes.

It wasn't only the students either. Plenty of the guardians sitting in the back had started snoring in their chairs. Flio, for his part, was watching attentively. But Rys, sitting next to him, was slumped over, fast asleep, Wyne in her lap. Both of them were snoring contentedly.

They've been running around all day, those two... Flio thought, smiling his usual easygoing smile. *Oh, well. I suppose I'll just have to watch out for them as well!*

◇The Following Morning◇

After the lesson was finished, the students and their guardians spent the night in the rooms that had been prepared for each family. The next day when they woke up, they went fishing on a boat Junia had prepared for them. After that,

they had free time until lunch to do as they pleased.

Taclyde looked troubled as he watched the children playing in the sea. “The after-dinner observation class was a complete failure...” he grumbled. “Most of the students fell asleep! It was hardly a class at all!” He scratched his nose as he looked over his notes. But in front of him, the students and their guardians alike were enjoying the sea with happy smiles on their faces.

“Still,” he admitted, “if our goal was to deepen our camaraderie, I suppose we succeeded. I’ll tell the headmaster it was a success.” He jotted down another note or two on the pad of paper in his hands.

After lunch, Flio conjured another portal, and everyone returned to Houghtow City.

◇Flio’s House—That Night◇

“The summer camp was great fun, wasn’t it, my lord husband?” Rys smiled as she sat in front of the mirror on her dresser, brushing her hair.

“It was!” said Flio. “Garyl and Elinàsze enjoyed it a lot! And Wyne, too, since she ended up coming along.”

“That Wyne...” Rys said, smiling with a mix of fondness and exasperation. “The way Tanya pounced on her the moment she got back...”

“Poor girl,” said Flio, smiling wryly. “But she *did* break a promise, after all.”

Rys finished with her hair and came over to Flio, sitting down on the side of the bed and pressing up to her husband. “What did you think of my new swimsuit?” she asked, blushing slightly, looking up at Flio with big puppy-dog eyes.

The puppy-dog eyes had their intended effect. Flio wrapped his arms around Rys and held her close. “It looked great on you,” he said. “Absolutely amazing...”

“Thank you, my lord husband. My wonderful, amazing love...” She closed her eyes. Flio leaned in, kissing her softly. The two lay back on the bed. With a single twitch of Flio’s finger, the bedroom lights went out, cloaking them in darkness.

◇Meanwhile, in the Children's Room◇

Wyne, Elinàsze, and Garyl shared a single bedroom. There, on the bottom bunk of the triple-layer bunk bed, the three of them were curled up together, deep asleep.

The top bunk was supposed to be for Elinàsze, the middle bunk for Garyl, and the bottom bunk for Wyne, but instead, all three were fast asleep together on Wyne's bunk.

"Zzz..." Wyne snored, beginning to talk in her sleep. "Beach... Lotsa fun..."

Garyl and Elinàsze held her tighter, reacting to the noise. And on they slept, safe and sound.

Chapter 5: Capriccio for the Dark Citadel

◇Houghtow City—Flio's House◇

The summer camp was over. For a while, the days passed uneventfully. And then, one day, a dire crow came flying from Houghtow City, landing on the road leading to Flio's house.

"Thank you, Good Sir Caw-lins! That's quite close enough," said a cloaked man riding on the dire crow's back. "Mister Flio's house is outside the city walls, you know! He puts up a defensive barrier after dark. It's dangerous to get too close!" The man dismounted, followed by an expressionless girl dressed in gothic lolita fashion. "Now..." he went on, turning to look in the direction of Flio's house. "I just need to ask Mister Flio to let the barrier down for me."

Suddenly, the cloaked man found a broom shoved violently in his face, wielded by a woman in a maid uniform standing inside the barrier. "This is the residence of Lord Flio," she declared, regarding the pair with sharp eyes and violent intent. "What business do you have here in the early hours of the morning? Answer well, or I—Tanya, maid of Lord Flio—shall be your opponent!"

"O-Oh! Goodness, gracious me!" the man said. "Don't worry! I'm no trespasser!"

"So you say," said Tanya. "But you are dressed for stealth, are you not?"

"Indeed! That I am!" the man said, removing his hood. "Miss Maid, I'm terribly sorry to bother you, but I'm afraid I have some very urgent business to discuss with Mister Flio! I'm happy to wait until he's awake, if you'll give him a message for me! My name is..."

◇Later, in Flio's Parlor◇

Flio's house was built around a large living room on the first floor, big enough for the entire household to use at once. Separate from that were the additions Flio had built, including a number of guest rooms, and a parlor for entertaining visitors. That was where Flio was now.

“I had no idea what to expect when Tanya called me over here,” Flio said, smiling his usual easygoing smile at the Dark Regent Calsi’im, sitting across from him. “To what do I owe the pleasure so early in the morning, Mister Calsi’im?”

Calsi’im’s hood was down. To his left and right were the dire crow Good Sir Caw-lins and the magic doll Tia, both sitting quietly. Seated next to Flio were Ghozal, the former Dark One, and Uliminas, who used to serve as his confederate. They had come running when they heard who was here.

As Rys and Tanya placed cups of tea in front of everyone, Calsi’im looked over to Ghozal. “First, I must apologize to the retired Dark One, Lord Gholl, for accepting the post of Dark Regent without paying a visit to you first! That was a dreadful breach of etiquette on my part!” He bowed deeply, but Ghozal held up his hand, indicating for Calsi’im not to lower his head.

“That’s all right,” he said. “I abdicated the throne, you know. You don’t gotta pay me courtesy visits. I’m just an employee at a local general store.” Ghozal laughed.

“Well, that’s a relief!” said Calsi’im, his skull rattling as he laughed along with Ghozal. “I’m glad I don’t have to be on my best behavior!”

They kept chatting for some time, until the conversation hit a lull. Calsi’im cleared his throat and turned to face Flio directly. “Now, the thing that brings me here today, so early in the morning...” he said. “I’m terribly ashamed to say it, but I need your help once again, Lord Flio!”

Calsi’im had come here before to ask Flio for the Wolf of Justice’s help saving the Dark Army. At the time, he hadn’t known that the Wolf of Justice was Flio himself, but he noticed in his reports that the Wolf of Justice and his companions would appear almost every time they attacked a wagon carrying goods from the Fli-o’-Rys General Store. Based on those reports, he had surmised that Flio, the store’s manager, must have some means of contacting the Wolf of Justice.

“I see...” Flio said, his carefree smile not slipping in the slightest. “If there’s something I can do, I’d be glad to help!”

Calsi’im finished his cup of tea and sighed. “The Dark Army has been driven from the Dark Citadel!” he said. “And as much as it pains me, I’m at a loss as to

how to take it back!”

“What?!” Flio, Ghozal, and Uliminas’s eyes all shot open at once.

“D-Driven from the Dark Citadel?” asked Flio.

“Hrm...” said Ghozal. “What... What happened?”

“Meowt are mew talking about?” said Uliminas.

Tia, who had been sitting next to Calsi’im, stood up from her seat. “Allow me to explain the details,” she said. “I am the magic doll Tia, minion of the sitting Dark One Calsi’im.” Calsi’im interrupted her, pulling her aside. “What is the matter, Calsi’im?” she asked.

“I’m not the Dark One, Tia! I’m the Dark *Regent*! Take care not to get them mixed up!”

“You’re running the entire army on your own,” said Tia. “I don’t think anyone would mind.”

“Not at all! It would be quite improper! You must use my correct title...”

“Very well...” Tia agreed, reluctantly. “If it is your will, Calsi’im.” She turned back towards Flio and continued. “After subjugating the rebels, the Dark Army signed a peace treaty with the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode. The treaty brought peace to the demons living in our territory as well, but many do not look kindly at the prospect of a treaty with the human and demihuman kingdoms. Many of our vassals have stopped paying tribute. As of now, our war chest is in dire straits.”

Uliminas was stunned enough to do a spit take. “Bleh!” she said, wiping the tea from her face. “H-Hold on a meowment! I handled the meowney when Ghozal was Dark Meown. We were getting regular tribute the whole time! There should be enough saved up to last decades!”

“Ah, alas,” said Tia, narrowing her eyes. “Many demons stopped paying tribute during the reign of Yuigarde, the previous Dark One, due to his heavy-handed and tyrannical ways. Furthermore, he wasted our resources on his fruitless expedition against the rebels. Our financial situation was already quite dire.” Once again, Calsi’im pulled her aside. “Yes? What is it, Calsi’im?”

“Tia!” chided Calsi’im, bringing his skull up close to her ear to whisper. “Lord Yuigarde is the *current* Dark One, not the previous! And don’t forget to address him as *Lord* Yuigarde, please!”

“He’s the idiot king whose failures are to blame for our current situation,” countered Tia. “I don’t see a need to address him as *Lord*.”

“No, no! It’s very important to use the Dark One’s proper title!”

“Very well...” Tia said, even more reluctantly than last time. Her shoulders were quivering with suppressed anger as she nodded. “If you insist, Calsi’im...” She turned back to Flio. “And now Calsi’im is the Dark Regent, but we have very little money left, and almost no income at all.”

Ghozal sighed deeply. “Well, I can’t say I’m too surprised. All of the Dark Ones of history—myself included—used pure force to subjugate the demons they ruled over. You can call yourself Dark Regent or Dark One if you like...but with a weaker demon like you in charge, they’re not gonna feel inclined to do what you say.”

“Yeah... Demeown society runs on the purrinciple of ‘might makes right’...” Uliminas sighed, nodding in agreement. “But I still can’t believe they spent all of that meowney in such a short time! What was Phufun thinking...?”

“Phufun seems smart at first glance, with her glasses and everything,” said Ghozal. “But she goes with her gut on important decisions. And her gut has a terrible sense of judgment.”

“Meow’re not wrong...” Uliminas said, nodding again. “I guess that’s how she ended up with a meowron like Yuigarde...”

◇The Calgosi Coast—Meanwhile◇

“Achoo!” Phufun sneezed. “Ack! Where did that come from?!” Puzzled, she took out a handkerchief and wiped the snot off her nose. “I’m all recovered from the cold I got from visiting the north... I wonder if someone was talking about me?”

She put away the handkerchief and pushed her glasses up against the ridge of her nose. “Surely, it must be Master Yuigarde! I can feel it! Master Yuigarde must be close by! Oh, my Master! Today, at long last, is the day I find you!”

Squeezing her fists tight in determination, Phufun flew off for the beach, looking around every which way.

◇Back at Flio's Parlor◇

"We spoke with Zanzibar, the former rebel leader," Tia explained. "He offered us his own resources to use for the Dark Army. But someone has already stolen the treasure from his villas! Belianna and I are currently working to pursue the suspects, but the Dark Army's coffers are still nearly empty. And then, a man appeared before us..."

◇Tia's Memory—The Dark Citadel Throne Room, a Few Days Earlier◇

"So, you're the human merchant who wants to do business in Dark Army territory?" Calsi'im sat on a cloth spread out before the throne. Tia had told him time and time again that he should sit *on* the throne when visitors came, at the very least, but he refused to listen.

The man before him was accompanied by two women, who seemed to be his servants. He bowed deeply, the women lowering their heads behind him. "Dark Regent Calsi'im," he said. "My most humble thanks for allowing me into your presence. It is a great honor."

"Not at all, not at all!" said Calsi'im, waving aside the formalities with his honest humility. "I'm nobody important!"

"We are merchants, struggling to make our living in the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode," the man said. "But I heard that you signed a peace treaty with the Magical Kingdom. With your permission, I would like to open a business on your side of the border."

"Hm..." mused Calsi'im. "A merchant, eh? What precisely do you have in mind?"

"By your leave," the man said. "A friend of mine told me that the lands near the Dark Citadel are rich in magic gems. I would beg your royal license to excavate them for sale."

Calsi'im cocked his head. "Hmmmm... It's true that there are veins of magic gems all throughout the valleys near the Dark Citadel. But the gems there have so many impurities that they're hardly worth— Mnhfff?!"

Tia clapped a hand over Calsi'im's bony mouth. "Calsi'im!" she whispered. "These people are here because they *don't* know that the gems are impure! It would be to our advantage to feign ignorance on the matter ourselves."

"Mgghf..." Calsi'im whispered back. "B-But Tia! That would be a lie! Mfffhf...!"

"We need money more than anything right now," Tia said. "Even a little bit would help. Please, just don't bring it up..."

"Mhmhfff..." Calsi'im nodded, giving in. "All right. If you say so, Tia, I'll go along with it."

Tia turned to face the man. "Ahem!" she said. "I apologize for the interruption. Please, continue."

"V-Very well," the man said. "Our plan is to send the magic gems back to the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode for processing, and then sell the finished products. I will gladly offer up half of my profits as tribute to the Dark Citadel."

"*Half* of your profits?!?!?" Calsi'im and Tia exclaimed at once. The two had been planning to ask for a tenth, but the man's deal was better than they could have imagined.

Tia leaned in close to whisper again with Calsi'im. "C-Calsi'im!" she said. "That's a very attractive offer..."

"It is..." Calsi'im whispered back. "But this man has a bit too much of a silver tongue for my taste..."

"I agree..." said Tia. "I was thinking the same thing. But..."

"If it's real, it would be a tremendous help to our finances..." Calsi'im agreed.

Watching Calsi'im and his minion whisper away, the man snapped his fingers. At his signal, the two women accompanying him brought out a pair of large treasure chests and presented them to Calsi'im. "I am prepared to offer you this as a deposit, provided we can come to an agreement quickly."

Calsi'im and Tia opened their eyes wide in shock. The chests were stuffed full of gold bars.

"T-Tia!" said Calsi'im. "We could solve our money problems with that!"

“Yes!” said Tia. “Yes, we could!”

Calsi'im and Tia hugged each other tight, breaking out into a spontaneous dance.

“Then,” said the man, smiling as he held out a piece of paper on which a contract had been written. “Could I trouble you for your signature?”

Tia read the contract over and over again. “It’s written very plainly,” she said. “Just as he said. It even mentions the money he paid in advance. Nothing about it looks suspicious...”

“Well, then!” said Calsi'im, putting his signature on the contract. “If Tia says so, then so it must be!”

◇Houghtow City—Flio’s Parlor◇

“And this is that contract,” said Tia, removing a piece of paperwork from her pocket. “There are two copies, and this is ours. It’s this contract’s fault we had to leave the Dark Citadel!” she shrieked, biting angrily at the hem of her own skirt.

Flio took the contract and looked it over. “I don’t see anything wrong with it...” he said, tilting his head. It was exactly as Tia had described in her account.

“Hmm...” said Uliminas. “Everything seems to be in meowrder to me too...”

The document had the following two provisions: one giving the man’s company mining rights within Dark Army territory, and the other promising fifty percent of the profit from sales of the magic gems as tribute to the Dark Citadel. They were exactly the terms Tia had been given. Other than that, all there was was the man’s signature and blood seal, and Calsi'im’s signature and the chip of bone he was using as a seal in place of blood, sealed in wax.

“I thought so as well,” said Tia. “But...” She flipped over the contract, showing them the reverse side.

“Huh...?” Confused, Flio and Uliminas looked where Tia was pointing to a line of tiny letters, too small to actually be read.

Flio enlarged the letters with magic so that everyone could read them. “With the signature of this contract, the Dark Citadel will become property of the

Shadow Conglomerate.”

◇Dark Citadel—Throne Room◇

A man sat on the throne—the merchant who had appeared before Tia and the Dark Regent Calsi'im the day before. But the look on his face now was nothing like a merchant's; he wore a wicked grin befitting a true evildoer.

“Bwa ha ha ha ha!” he cackled. “To think that I, a human, would be the first to sit on both the throne of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode and the throne of the Dark One!” For this man, in truth...was the Shadow King!

Once, he had reigned as king of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode. But when his daughter, who was then the First Princess, discovered that he had been using his position to pursue his criminal enterprises at the expense of the country, he was driven from the throne and thrust into exile. Afterwards, he gained the loyalty of the demon fox sisters Kintsuno the Gold and Gintsuno the Silver, and continued to pursue his underworld business with their aid.

The Shadow King grinned as he sat on the throne. Flanking him to his right and left were the aforementioned Kintsuno and Gintsuno.

“The Shadow King's done it again,” Kintsuno marveled. “To think I nearly killed you when you lost all of our money off the Calgosi Coast!”

“Yes indeed!” yipped Gintsuno. “I suppose letting you live was the right decision after all.”

“Bwa ha ha!” the Shadow King laughed again. “You'll never find a man as competent as me, even if you search the whole wide world! Behold! I have lawfully obtained the Dark Citadel using nothing more than a contract and a chest of gold!”

The Shadow King and the demon fox sisters had gone to the Calgosi Coast intending to enjoy a rollicking holiday. But they were hit by a stray cannonball from the battle with the demon pirates and lost everything they had. Alive, but with nothing to their name, the trio heard that the Dark Army had been dealing with its own money problems and hatched a cunning scheme.

“But I can hardly believe the Dark Army would back off with just one piece of paper...” said Kintsuno.

“Don’t be a fool,” said the Shadow King. “This is no ordinary contract! This is a magic item from another world I obtained through my secret contacts while I was still king of Klyrode: a Blood Oath Contract!” A sinister grin spread wide across his face.

“I’ve heard stories about those...” said Kintsuno. “I didn’t realize they actually existed!”

“Tell me about it!” Gintsuno agreed. “I had no idea they were real, let alone that the Shadow King had been holding on to one.” The fox sisters smiled lasciviously as they pressed up close to the Shadow King from either side.

“But you used a false identity on that contract, did you not?” asked Kintsuno. “Would the magic still be effective?”

“Certainly!” the Shadow King said, proudly stroking his beard. “It isn’t the signature that matters, but the blood seal! Or the splinter of bone, in that skeleton’s case, seeing as he doesn’t have any blood. That’s what determines the validity of the signatures on the contract. I can use whatever name I please!”

“I see!” yipped Gintsuno. “No wonder your scheme went so flawlessly, with your knowledge and expertise!” She wrapped her arms around the Shadow King’s shoulders.

“Then I suppose we shall be proceeding with the plan?” asked Kintsuno.

“That we shall,” said the Shadow King. “We’ll auction off the Dark Citadel! The highest bid can be its master if they so please. Bwa ha ha ha ha! Imagine all the demons who would love to sit on this throne! Why, if the Dark Citadel was theirs, the title of Dark One might not be so distant a dream! Imagine what kind of price the Dark Citadel itself could fetch...”

“And once the money’s ours, we get out of here!” Gintsuno finished.

“Exactly! And we use the money to further expand the operations of the Shadow Conglomerate! The three of us will keep getting richer and richer and richer!”

“Oh, my Shadow King!” yipped Kintsuno.

“We’ll follow you to the ends of the world!” declared Gintsuno.

Wedge between the two sisters, the Shadow King laughed and laughed and laughed.

◇Houghtow City—Flio’s Parlor◇

“This is a Blood Oath Contract...” said Ghozal, tilting his head in surprise as he looked over the contract in his hand. “I’ve heard legends about these things, but I had no idea there were any in this world...”

“Meowt’s a Blood Oath Contract?” asked Uliminas, a dubious expression on her face. Uliminas had been one of the most knowledgeable members of the Dark Army during Ghozal’s day, but even she had never heard of such a thing.

“Hrm...” said Ghozal. “The Blood Oath Contract is a magic item from another world—the Celestial Plane. Any contract written on one of these will be enforced by a goddess called the Contract Executor. It’s called a ‘Blood Oath’ because you need to use a seal of your own blood to activate it. Or a bit of bone in Calsi’im’s case, seeing as he doesn’t have any blood.”

Suddenly, Calsi’im leaned his bony body forward. “Most gracious!” he said. “I had been hoping to ask Mister Flio to look into this Blood Oath Contract business for me. I thought a great man and friend of the Wolf of Justice like him just might have some experience with magic items from other worlds, or else be able to introduce me to someone who would! But I seem to have hit the jackpot!” Flio and Ghozal exchanged a look as Calsi’im nodded along to himself. “Tell me, Mister Ghozal,” he continued. “All I know is that anyone who breaks the terms of the contract will face divine retribution at the hands of the gods of the Celestial Plane, but what does that mean, precisely? Do you happen to know what the retribution would actually be?”

“Hrm...” Ghozal mused. “From what I’ve heard, the Contract Executor will appear and cast your soul into Purgatory.”

“Oh, is that all?”

Ghozal furrowed his brow. “‘Is that all’?! We’re talking about *Purgatory* here! Your soul would be purified through unimaginable torment for all eternity, never to be reborn again!”

But Calsi'im seemed perfectly cheerful. "Pishposh!" he said, his jawbone clattering with laughter. "Why, then I could have settled the matter simply at the cost of my one soul! If I had known that, I would have never told my army to withdraw!" He turned to face Tia. "Come, Tia! Let's rally the whole army and take back the Dark Citadel! I'll gladly let my soul be cast into Purgatory!"

Calsi'im shot to his feet, but Tia grabbed him by the arm and forced him back into the chair, her expression resolute. "I won't allow it! If you were to order *me* into Purgatory, I would gladly obey! But I won't allow you to speak of falling there yourself! Never!"

"N-Now, Tia!" protested Calsi'im. "You know I'm just an old skeleton. I'll be gone sooner or later no matter what. What's the harm, if this problem of ours can be resolved at the cost of one old man's soul...?"

"I won't allow it!"

"B-But..."

"I! Won't! Allow! It!" Tia tightly clung to Calsi'im's arm, refusing to let go.

Flio stared intently at the duo as they argued. *Tia's a magic doll like Minilio...* he thought. *I had no idea they were capable of expressing so much emotion!*

"I won't!" Tia insisted, pulling harder on Calsi'im's arm. "I will never obey such an order, no matter what!" But just then...*pop!* Calsi'im's arm came clean out of its socket.

"Gaaah!" he shrieked. "M-My arm! My aaaaaarm!"

"C-Calsi'im?!" Tia exclaimed. "Oh, no! I forgot myself!" She did her best to return Calsi'im's arm to its proper place, but she, too, was starting to panic. In her haste, she stuck Calsi'im's arm straight through his eye socket.



Flio rushed over to set the situation straight. "Um..." he said as he affixed Calsi'im's arm back to his shoulder. "I think I might have an idea..."

◇Later, in the Dark Citadel Throne Room◇

The Shadow King sat on the Dark One's throne. To either side, the demon fox sisters waited at attention. Before him stood the Dark Regent Calsi'im, accompanied by Tia.

"If it isn't the Dark Regent Calsi'im!" said the Shadow King, no longer concealing his personality. He leaned back on the throne, spreading his legs in a show of arrogance and leisure as he looked down at the skeleton before him. "What business have you with the Shadow King?"

Tia took a step forward, her expression cold as ice. "How dare you speak that way to the Dark Regent?!" she demanded. "Unforgivable!" She attempted to step closer to the Shadow King, but Kintsuno and Gintsuno moved in front of her, blocking her way.

Tia clicked her tongue and returned to Calsi'im's side, but her cold expression did not leave her face. "I can't stand seeing such filth sully the Dark Citadel..."

"I know, Tia," said Calsi'im. "But you can leave the rest to me." He gave Tia a reassuring pat on the shoulder before turning to face the Shadow King. "Well then, Mister Shadow King! You seem to be in a good mood!"

"Oh?" the Shadow King said. "Don't tell me you came all this way for a social call. I am quite busy, you know. If you're just here to exchange pleasantries, I'm afraid our business is over. Go on, hurry along home." He waved his hand to shoo Calsi'im away.

But Calsi'im only laughed, his jawbone rattling. "Now, now! There's no need for that! My business will be over in just a moment."

"Business?" The Shadow King cackled, triggering a titter of laughter from the demon foxes, hiding their mouths behind their open hands. "But I have no business with you! Now, begone!"

"No business with me?" said Calsi'im. "Is that any attitude to take with the

cosigner of your very important contract?” He beckoned to a man who had been waiting behind him, who stepped forward to his side. Whoever the man was, he was wearing a white mask decorated with a spade symbol.

“This man you’ve brought with you...” the Shadow King observed. “He seems to be human, but why is he masked?”

“My friend here is a teeny tiny bit shy, that’s all!” said Calsi’im. “You already searched him for weapons, didn’t you? I don’t see any reason he shouldn’t be allowed to wear a mask!”

The Shadow King sneered. “You *are* aware, aren’t you, that the throne room is under the effect of an antimagic field? There will be no summoning friends or attacking me with magic.”

The man—Flio—took another step forward. At first, he had planned to wear his blue wolf mask and accompany Calsi’im as the Wolf of Justice, but it occurred to him that the Shadow King might not be willing to grant an audience if Calsi’im had the Wolf of Justice among his party. So instead, he grabbed one of the generic masks the Fli-o’-Rys General Store sold for use in masquerades and the like.

“Mister Shadow King,” Flio said. “It is my understanding that you are party to a Blood Oath Contract, along with my associate Mister Calsi’im?”

“Yes, quite,” the Shadow King answered. “Everything is in order. He looked over the contents and applied his blood seal. Although, in this skeleton’s case, he had to use a bone chip instead.”

“Yes, so I’ve been told. And then, under the terms of the contract, you evicted Mister Calsi’im and the rest of the Dark Army from the Dark Citadel?”

“‘Evicted’ is an ugly word.” The Shadow King pointed to the back of the contract, drawing everyone’s attention to the line of minuscule text. “Look! It’s written right here in the contract he signed: ‘With the signature of this contract, the Dark Citadel will become property of the Shadow Conglomerate.’ Although I suppose the letters are a bit too small to read without some sort of magnification!”

The demon fox sisters snickered at the Shadow King’s trick, but Flio ignored

them. He touched his finger to his mask. “Yes, I am aware of that as well,” he said. “However, there’s something I wonder if *you* know about the mechanisms of a Blood Oath Contract.”

“The mechanisms?” The Shadow King furrowed his brow.

“Yes, the mechanisms. Mister Calsi’im told me about the Blood Oath Contract, so I decided to do a little research of my own. It’s a magic item that binds its signers to an absolute contract, enforced by a goddess of the Celestial Plane.”

“Oh?” the Shadow King said, his tone somewhat more respectful. “So you *do* know a thing or two about it...” He frowned, puzzled, staring at Flio’s mask. *The only reference to the Blood Oath Contract in the whole of the Magical Kingdom is in a grimoire in the royal archives, accessible only to a select few of the royal family! Who is this man...?*

“Are you aware, Mister Shadow King, that there are exceptions to this rule?” Flio asked.

“Exceptions?”

“Yes. Even if both parties come to a mutual agreement and mark the contract with their blood seal, if the contract itself contains some kind of trick meant to prevent one party from understanding what they are signing, the Contract Executor has the authority to declare it void.”

“Hmph. You know about that too, do you...?” He grumbled. “Well then, my mysterious masked friend. Are you going to summon the Contract Executor for us? You’d need to cast the spell Judgment, and *that* is Celestial Magic! Or do you mean to tell me that there is someone in this world of ours capable of wielding the magic of the gods?” The Shadow King grinned, confident in his victory.

“Well,” said Flio, “I can cast it right away, if it isn’t any trouble.”

“What? O-Of all the preposterous...” The Shadow King grumbled and clicked his tongue. But then he noticed something. Calsi’im, Tia, his own underlings lurking in the edges of the throne room, and the demon fox sisters themselves to his left and right were all staring at something above his head.

“I-Is there something above me?!” He looked up.

There was a woman floating in midair, dressed in a tattered cloak. Her body was that of a young maiden, but her head was nothing but a skull. She held a scythe in her arms, nearly ten times as large as her body. *“Be not afraid,”* she said, speaking in their minds. *“I am the Contract Executor. The spell Judgment has been cast. I am here to see it done.”*

The Shadow King broke out in a cold sweat. “I-It can’t be!” he said in a shrill falsetto. “Someone cast Celestial Magic?! But nobody even did an incantation! N-Nobody can cast Celestial Magic without an incantation!”

Flio stared at him from behind his mask. He had been the one to cast the spell. Not long ago, when he had been treating Tanya’s wounds, Flio had accidentally taught himself Celestial Magic. It had been a simple matter of searching his spells for any pertaining to the Blood Oath Contract.

I cast it without an incantation because I thought it would be less conspicuous... he thought. *But I guess most people need an incantation to cast Celestial Magic! I’ll be more careful next time not to stand out.*

In fact, among all the humans, demihumans, demons, and everyone else living in the world of Klyrode, there were only two individuals capable of using Celestial Magic. Flio was one of them.

The Contract Executor floating above the Shadow King’s head swung her scythe, and the two copies of the contract between Calsi’im and the Shadow King floated up into the air before her.

“H-H-Hold on a moment!” said the Shadow King, putting on his best smile and his most humble affect. “I-I realize that that bit is a *little bit* difficult to read, but I made certain he understood it! I assure you I certainly was *not* trying to deceive Mister Calsi’im...”

Kintsuno and Gintsuno ran up close to him.

“Y-Yeah!” yipped Kintsuno. “It wasn’t on purpose!”

“He understood the terms!” Gintsuno yipped. “The contract is valid!”

The two smiled as kindly as they could, but their voices were unmistakably shrill.

The Contract Executor looked over the contracts. Then she cast her gaze towards the Shadow King and the demon fox sisters and raised her scythe over her head. She uttered a single word. “*Guilty.*” And down came the scythe. The contracts, which had been floating in the air, were torn to pieces. The scraps rained down on the Shadow King’s head.

“I-It can’t be...” said the Shadow King.

“The Blood Oath Contract...” Kintsuno continued.

“...It’s gone!” finished Gintsuno.

The three stared, dumbfounded.

“Well, how about that!” said Calsi’im. “It looks like that contract of yours is no more! I suppose you’d best be showing yourselves out of the Dark Citadel!”

The Shadow King sighed and turned to face Calsi’im. “You don’t have the strength to cast me out!” he said. “There are only three of you, and I have two thousand elite mercenaries and the demon fox sisters on my side! We’ll take you prisoner by force!”

But as he spoke, the Shadow King noticed something else. His underlings, who had been keeping a perimeter around the throne room, were all lying unconscious on the floor. Not a single one was on their feet. He did a double-take and saw that a great white wolf had somehow made its way into the throne room.

“H-How did this wolf get here?!” he demanded, grinding his teeth together as he shot to his feet and rushed for the back of the throne room. “You can’t use teleportation magic in the Dark Citadel’s throne room! What did you *do*?!”

Just then, a crow’s caw rang out. “Caw—!”

“Ngh?!” The Shadow King turned to see a dire crow land next to Calsi’im and Tia. “Did that crow carry the wolf in here?! That’s one way to get around the antimagic field, I suppose. And she’s using physical attacks to get around the restriction on offensive magic! Damn them!” he angrily muttered, hiding himself. “Kintsuno! Gintsuno!” he barked at his underlings. “What are you doing?! It’s just one wolf! Gang up on it!”

But the demon fox sisters didn't seem eager to follow his orders.

"G-Gintsuno..." Kintsuno whispered to her sister. "You don't suppose that wolf is a lupine demon, by any chance...?"

"I-I had been wondering the same thing, K-Kintsuno..." said Gintsuno.

"I wonder... Is that the same lupine that's been running around playing guardian deity for the Magical Kingdom's supply shipments? This might be a bit more than we can handle..."

"If she's *that* lupine, does that mean that that man is...?" Gintsuno trailed off, her body shaking with fear.

A look of shock came over the Shadow King's face. He pointed a trembling finger at the masked Flio. "Y-You!" he said. "Are you...the Wolf of Justice?!"

During the war, the Wolf of Justice and his companions had fought off attack after attack on the Magical Kingdom's supply lines. There wasn't a demon alive who hadn't heard of him. That should have made him a figure of hatred among demonkind, but demons were a people who respected power. Many of them saw him more as an object of envy for his strength. It was common knowledge that the Wolf of Justice always fought with a great white wolf by his side, as the Shadow King and the demon fox sisters were certainly well aware.

Flio, however, cocked his head in innocent puzzlement. *Huh...?* he thought. *I wore a different mask this time so they wouldn't recognize me! How did they figure it out?*

"I-In that case," yipped Kintsuno, "we should get out of here!" She transformed from her beguiling feminine figure into a golden demon fox.

"Run awaaaay!" Gintsuno agreed, turning into a silver fox not unlike her sister. She picked up the Shadow King, who was still hiding in the back of the throne room, by the scruff of his neck.

"Byeeee!" The foxes yipped, escaping through a secret passage behind the throne.

But Rys—the lupine nuzzling affectionately up to Flio—made no move to chase them. In fact, Calsi'im, Tia, and the dire crow all simply stood there as the

foxes fled.

“Oh!” Flio, who had gotten distracted wondering what had given away his disguise, suddenly remembered where he was and turned to address Calsi’im. “I suppose that’s all you need from us, then?”

“Yes, thank you, Mister Flio!” said Calsi’im. “You were a tremendous help! Thanks to you, we were able to take back the Dark Citadel with no harm done!” Calsi’im gave another one of his rattling laughs. “*They* can take care of things from here!” He looked on at the secret passage through which the Shadow King and the fox sisters had vanished.

◇Later, in a Forest Behind the Dark Citadel◇

At first glance, this corner of the forest looked completely unremarkable—just another overgrown thicket. But then, out jumped Kintsuno and Gintsuno, still in their demon fox forms.

“I-It looks like we got away...” said Kintsuno. Gintsuno couldn’t reply, as she was carrying the Shadow King in her mouth, but she nodded in fervent agreement.

“The lupine must have worn herself out defeating the mercenaries in the throne room!” said the Shadow King, grinning in relief at their near escape. “Ah ha ha! I thought they were a useless lot, but I suppose they came in handy in the end!”

Suddenly, Kintsuno came to an abrupt stop. “Yip?!”

Gintsuno skidded to a halt beside her.

“Watch out!” blustered the Shadow King. “Wh-What was *that* about?! You nearly choked me!” Indeed, the force of the large fox stopping abruptly had gotten his neck caught rather badly in the collar of his shirt.

Just then, a number of figures had jumped out of the underbrush. “Ah!” said the Shadow King. “The mercenaries I ordered to lie in wait in case of an emergency, is it? I’m glad to see you remembered your— Huh?!” The words died in his mouth. These weren’t his reinforcements, in fact. They were the members of the Dark Army he had driven out of the Dark Citadel, along with Calsi’im.

“Lord Calsi’im was right,” one of them said.

“So they tried to escape this way after all!”

The Shadow King and the demon fox sisters were outnumbered five or six to one.

“N-Ngh!” the Shadow King exclaimed. “What happened to my mercenaries?! I-I’m sure I ordered them to wait here...”

“Oh, them?” said a man, stepping out in front of the Shadow King. “They’re long gone, I’m afraid.”

When they saw who it was, the Shadow King and the demon fox sisters’ eyes went wide with shock. The Shadow King put a friendly smile on his face as he addressed the newcomer by name. “W-Well! What a surprise to meet you here, Mister Zanzibar...!”

Yes! The one who stood before them was none other than the former rebel leader Zanzibar! Behind him, apparently keeping an eye on the prisoner, was Belianna.

“W-We have been most worried about you!” the Shadow King went on. “We heard a rumor that you were taken captive by the Dark Army after we parted ways in the desert!”

“Y-Yeah!” said Kintsuno, putting on a friendly smile of her own. “We tried all kinds of tricks, looking for ways to break you out...”

Gintsuno still had the Shadow King in her mouth and couldn’t speak, so she just nodded in agreement.

“You don’t say,” said Zanzibar, shooting a withering glance at his interlocutors. “You were looking for ways to break me out, were you? So you mean to say you *weren’t* busy stealing my hidden treasure.”

“O-Of course!” The Shadow King said, furrowing his brow with stress. “Th-That’s what the mercenaries were here for...” The Shadow King and the demon fox sisters had once demanded a hefty sum to shelter Zanzibar’s army. Worse, they were the ones who plundered Zanzibar’s villas of their treasures. Zanzibar was the last person any of them wanted to see.

“They must have had a difficult time of it,” said Zanzibar, cracking his knuckles as he strode forward. An aura of malicism welled up behind him, shaking with fury. “They were in a *terrible* hurry to get away once they saw me. Although, thanks to Miss Belianna, we were able to catch them. I’ll give them back, of course. After all, they’ve already confessed to everything.”

Belianna stepped up beside Zanzibar, hefting her scythe on her shoulder. “You three are a damned great deal of trouble,” she said, her own malicism aura manifesting. “Me and the old man here have been looking damned near everywhere for you! I had to miss my sister’s damned summer camp! I’m looking forward to venting some of my damned frustration...”

“N-N-Now hold on just a moment, Mister Zanzibar!” said the Shadow King. “And you, young lady! You have it all wrong! I haven’t stolen a single coin from you! This is slander!” He gesticulated furiously from his dangling position.

“I see...” said Zanzibar. “And are you prepared to sign on it?”

“S-Sign?”

“Yes,” Zanzibar confirmed. “Perhaps you will sign this contract for me, if you will be so kind?”

The Shadow King balked. “Th-This is a Blood Oath Contract! H-How did you...?!”

The contract consisted of a single sentence. “The Shadow King will use neither falsehood nor trickery in his dealings with Mister Zanzibar.”

“I received it from a benefactor of mine,” Zanzibar said. “Regardless, if what you are saying is true, then you should have no reason to hesitate. May I have your blood seal, O Shadow King? An honest man like yourself should have nothing to worry about.” He smirked wickedly. “Unless you’re afraid of the Contract Executor coming for your head.”

He punctuated his last statement by pulling his thumb across his own neck demonstratively.

“/ could take his damned head,” said Belianna, spinning her scythe in a lethal-looking arc. “There’s no damned need for this.”

Unsurprisingly, the Shadow King's face blanched white. The three had been on the verge of escape, only to find themselves surrounded on all sides. They were trapped, like flies in a web.

◇Later, in the Dark Citadel Throne Room◇

Calsi'im sat on his cloth in front of the throne. "Little Belianna tells me that they've safely seen our malefactors to the underground prison! It seems they fainted of their own volition! It might be some time before we can question them... I do wish we could have captured them without anyone getting hurt..." Calsi'im scratched the top of his skull.

"True enough," Flio said, smirking. "We do need to question them about the Shadow Conglomerate. How about it? Do you want me to heal them with magic?"

"Oh, no, no, no, no!" insisted Calsi'im. "We mustn't do that! Mister Zanzibar told me to leave them as they are! I suppose he's still angry at them for stealing all of his treasure!"

"Ahhh," Flio said. "I see." His face relaxed to his usual easygoing smile, but with the spades mask on, nobody around him could see what expressions he was making.

Rys, who had turned into her human form and put on a change of clothes, stepped up beside her husband. "Incidentally, my lord husband, why did you ask Zanzibar and the others from the Dark Army to arrest those three? If you had asked me, I could have easily done it on my own..."

"That's true," Flio said. "But I figured Mister Zanzibar and the rest of the Dark Army could afford to do some of the work. Right, Mister Calsi'im?"

"Quite right!" Calsi'im agreed. "Mister Zanzibar has committed some rather serious crimes! Treason, for instance! And most of the others I sent were his fellow rebels who rejoined the Dark Army, you see. They'll have to answer for those crimes when the Dark One Yuigarde returns! But if they were the ones to arrest the people who tried to take the Dark Citadel from us..."

"I see!" said Rys, clapping her fist against her palm in realization. "Even a useless idiot brute like Yuigarde won't be inclined to punish them if they're

doing such good work!”

Rys’s words brought another smirk to Flio’s face. “A useless idiot brute, you say?” It sounded like Rys knew Yuigarde well from her time in the Dark Army.

“Well spoken, Rys,” said Tia, nodding in agreement. “I myself could not have described Yuigarde more accurately.”

“N-Now, Tia...” said Calsi’im. “How many times have I told you? You mustn’t forget to call him *Lord* Yuigarde, or at least Dark One! M-Moreover, you mustn’t use words like ‘idiot’ to...to...” Calsi’im trailed off. Even he couldn’t deny the accuracy of Rys’s words.

Flio smiled happily. “Well, we got the Dark Citadel back!” he said. “That just leaves one more problem for us to solve.”

Calsi’im and Tia’s expressions suddenly turned dark. “That’s right...” said Calsi’im. “We got the Shadow King and his minions, but that doesn’t do anything for our financial situation...”

“And Zanzibar’s hidden treasure was lost...” said Tia. “How are we going to pay our army’s salaries or the Dark Citadel’s utility bills...?”

The two folded their arms in thought.

“Actually...” said Flio. “I might have an idea...”

“What was that, Mister Flio?! Y-You do?!”

“Wh-What kind of idea?!”

Calsi’im and Tia came running up. Flio began to explain...

◇Days Later—The Fli-o’-Rys General Store◇

“Let’s see...” Greanyl looked over the contents of the wagon, paperwork in her hand, making sure the inventory was in order. “That seems to be everything. We’re heading out! Take care while we’re gone!”

She jumped up on the wagon platform while everyone else busied themselves with their own tasks.

“Seems like a large load this time,” said the demon horse pulling the wagon as the two left the store behind them.

“Yes,” answered Greanyl. “Today’s delivery is for the new shop, after all.” Then she noticed who the horse was. “Wait... Lord Dalc Horst? How strange. I could have sworn it was Locrah today...”

“O-Oh, well, you know Locrah. He doesn’t really like working all that much. So I guess I’m pulling your wagon again! Nice working with you!” For some reason, Dalc Horst seemed nervous about something.

“Hm...” Greanyl replied. “Well, it’s no trouble on my end. I always know I have nothing to worry about with you pulling the wagon. Do you think you can double-time it?”

“Of course! Leave it to me! By the way, Greanyl... After this delivery, do you want to get a bite to eat?”

“I have more intelligence gathering to do,” said Greanyl. “Don’t worry about me. You can go out to eat on your own if you like.”

“B-But...” Dalc Horst protested, “Th-That’s not what I want...” He sighed as he sped up. “Oh, well. Today’s another miss...”

“Hm?” Greanyl looked puzzled as the pair sped along.

◇Dark Citadel—Front Gate◇

A great crowd of demons stood in front of the Dark Citadel. This group, however, was lined up facing the opposite direction of the Citadel itself. They were queued up, making their way towards a building that had once been a barracks, and had now been remodeled as a shop.

There was a sign outside. It read, “Fli-o’-Rys General Store: Dark Citadel Branch.”

The inside was packed with demons, looking over all the weapons, magic items, and sundry goods on display and taking what they liked to the register for purchase.

“This sword is something else!” said one of the demon customers. “It looks like a normal sword, but it’s got a *ton* of enchantments!”

“These magic gems are incredible too...” marveled another. “It’s almost twice as powerful as the gems you can buy in the market town! And the price is

good...”

There was a market not far from the Dark Citadel where demons went to do commerce. But the goods on sale at the Fli-o’-Rys General Store were much higher quality than what you could purchase there, and far more reasonably priced. It was no surprise that the store had been tremendously busy since the day it opened.

“Whoa!” Rayne the pandaman exclaimed as he ran up to the display case carrying a wooden crate. “I just restocked these things, and they’re already almost gone! I guess I’d better restock them quick...” Indeed, the shelf had just about been picked clean.

“Th-This display case is empty too,” said the spider demon luki, fighting back a cold sweat and unsteady on his feet. “We’re even running out in the back room...”

Just then, the shadow demon Greanyl bolted into the store. “Greanyl of the Fli-o’-Rys Main Branch, reporting in! We have your supplies!”

“G-Greanyl!” Rayne cried in relief.

“Oh, good, you’re here!” said luki. “We had just started to run out of inventory. I was at my wit’s end...”

“I see,” said Greanyl. “Then I’ll help. We’ll have this store restocked in no time.”

Greanyl hurried back towards the wagon she had ridden here from Houghtow City to retrieve its inventory. Rayne and luki were close on her heels.

Three figures stood a ways away, watching the scene play out inside the store—the Dark Regent Calsi’im, his minion Tia, and Flio, the manager of the Fli-o’-Rys General Store.

“My, I didn’t know *what* to think when you said your plan was to open a Fli-o’-Rys branch store in the Dark Citadel!” exclaimed Calsi’im. “But it seems to be going off without a hitch!”

Tia clasped her hands together in front of her chest, pure joy on her face.

“You’ve been most generous,” she said, her eyes shining. “Giving us a full third of the proceeds from sales just for rent on an empty building... Employing demons who live in the Dark Citadel... Even paying us a finder’s fee for introducing them to you! You truly are our savior...”

Flio smiled his usual easygoing smile as he watched the bustle inside the store. It showed no signs of abating. “I’d been thinking of opening a second store for a while,” he said, “but there’s so much I would have to figure out. I would’ve had a lot of trouble without you to recommend the location and introduce me to people you know who might make good merchants. I should be thanking *you*.”

“Well, I’m very happy to hear that!” said Calsi’im, a slight look of anxiety crossing his face. “But...is this really what you want, Mister Flio?”

“What do you mean?” Flio asked.

“Well, you know! True, the Dark Army and the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode are at peace, but so far, that’s only while I’m serving as Dark Regent! There’s no telling if the Dark One Lord Yuigarde will wish to keep the treaty when he returns...”

Flio nodded and smiled. “In that case, I’ll just have to ask the Dark One personally when the time comes. I’m sure I can bring him around, with your help.”

“Hmmm...” Calsi’im thought. “It’s strange! With you saying so, somehow it doesn’t seem so impossible!” He laughed merrily, his jawbone rattling in his skull.

Tia and Flio simply smiled.

Epilogue

“Easy does it...” In the garden in front of Flio’s house, Garyl was up in the sky, struggling with his balance. The flight magic was working properly, but he was wavering fearfully back and forth.

Elinàsze ran up beneath her brother. “Incredible, Garyl!” she cried. “You learned how to cast Fly!”

“I-I dunno...” Garyl said. “This is still the best I can do... I can’t fly as well as you or dad. Ah, careful...”

“Well, I think it’s plenty incredible!” Elinàsze said, her eyes shining with pride as she looked up at Garyl. “You couldn’t fly at all before now!” She spoke an incantation and cast Fly herself, rising into the air. “Over here, Garyl!”

“W-Wait, sis! I’m still not good at balancing in the air...”

“You’ll be fine! I raced with big sis Wyne my very first time flying, remember?”

“B-But I’m not as good at magic as you, sis! I’m better at fighting and running...”

As the siblings were having their conversation in the sky, Wyne burst out of the front door and came running up beneath them. “Gare-Gare, you’re flying!” she shouted. “Wow! Wow! Let’s all have a race! To the top of the clouds!” A pair of great dragon wings appeared on her back, and she took to the sky. She flew up and up and up.

“You won’t beat me so easily this time!” Elinàsze declared, flying up after her sister.

“Hang on!” said Garyl. “I... I don’t know if I can do this! Easy... Easy...” Still wavering back and forth, he flew up after his sisters. He was much slower than them—Wyne and Elinàsze were gaining distance by the second. But Garyl kept at it, flying upwards as best he could.

Just then, Tanya ran out of the house after Wyne. For some reason, she was

clutching a pair of the dragonewt's underpants. "Young Mistress!" she shouted. "You've gone outside without your undergarments again! You won't escape this time!" Brandishing a broom in one hand, she manifested a pair of white feathered wings and flew up after the three in hot pursuit.

"Hwuh?!" said Wyne, noticing Tanya. "It's Tan-Tan! Race with us, Tan-Tan! Race!"

Tanya sped up. "This isn't a race, Young Mistress! You need to put on your undergarments!"

"B-Big Sis Wyne, did you go out without your panties again?!" Elinàsze said, blushing furiously.

"What?!" said Garyl. "Oh jeez, I'd better not look up!" Garyl, who had been angled upwards for the race, hastily turned his head the other way.

Flio watched from the window of the second-story hallway as his children played and laughed in the sky. "They seem to be enjoying themselves," he said, his usual affable expression on his face.

Rys stepped up beside him. "Everyone seems to be enjoying themselves lately," she said. "Although Tanya seems to lose her temper fairly often..."

"Well, Wyne keeps taking off her clothes, after all," Flio said. "Dragonewts have a high body temperature. Maybe that's why she doesn't like wearing clothes. Maybe I should try making her some clothes enchanted with a cooling spell..."

"Perhaps," said Rys. "If it gets Wyne to wear her clothing more often, I'm all for it." The two watched their children fly for some time before Rys continued. "They really are growing up fast, aren't they? I can't use flight magic at all, and now it's not just Elinàsze, but Garyl..."

"You don't need to worry about that, Rys," said Flio.

"Oh?"

Flio scooped her up in his arms and flew out the window. "You can fly with me!"

“My lord husband...” Rys held her husband close as she looked around. She could see the house below her, and the pasture and farm sprawling out in all directions. “This is...our home,” she said, smiling. “Perhaps you should take me flying more often.”

Flio held her close as the pair looked down over the lives they had built for themselves.



Everyone's Morrow Part 6

◇Deep in a Forest◇

In a forest, deep in the mountains, far from Castle Klyrode, the two-headed doppeladler Hugi-Mugi, formerly of the Infernal Four, was making a life for themselves, disguised in their human form.

“Waaah!!!”

“What is happening to us?!”

A group of adventurers, numbering in the dozens, were running lost through the forest, screaming their heads off. A mixture of humans and demihumans, they all looked quite strong, wielding top-quality equipment. But right now, they were running all out, trying desperately to escape the forest.

It was no surprise; chasing after them was a huge horde of rampaging wolf-type and bear-type magic beasts.

“So much for our plan to get rich by finding that giant gold magic beast...”

“Where did all those magic beasts come from, anyway?!”

The adventurers ran for their lives, the horde in hot pursuit. Eventually, they made it out and vanished every which way. The magic beasts stopped at the edge of the forest, picked up the high-quality gear the adventurers had dropped in their haste, and went back, making their way to a small hut deep in the forest. One of them, a giant bear, went up to knock gingerly on the door.

“Who is it, yes? Yes, who is it?” Hugi-Mugi said, opening the door to their hut. They only had one head in their human form, but they still spoke with two voices. The magic beasts knelt before them.

Shortly after Hugi-Mugi had moved into the forest, the magic beasts had gathered together, thinking to expel the outsider. But as soon as they saw the enraged Hugi-Mugi in their true form—an enormous two-headed monster bird—they realized that they had no chance of victory.

Ever since then, they treated Hugi-Mugi as the ruler of the forest, chasing the adventurers who came after them out of the woods and bringing them their gear as tribute.

“We see, yes!” said Hugi-Mugi. “You’ve chased away some adventurers again, yes! Yes, chased them away again! I’ll buy you something tasty as a reward, yes. Yes, tasty rewards!”

The horde of magic beasts let out a cry of joy.

Hugi-Mugi placed the weapons they’d been given in a set of wooden chests, which they carried on their back. There were five chests in total, all of them quite heavy, but Hugi-Mugi carried them along as if they weighed nothing at all. Eventually, they made their way out of the forest and arrived at the village.

A woman wearing round glasses came running out of a nearby shop the moment they arrived. “Ee hee hee! Hugi-Mugi! What a delight to see you!” The shop had a sign outside, reading “Shino’s General Store.”

“Shino!” said Hugi-Mugi. “We were just looking for you, yes! We have some weapons to sell to your shop, yes! Yes, weapons for sale!”

They hadn’t finished speaking before Shino grabbed them by their free arm and began pulling them into her shop. “Oh, my! How wonderful! Your weapons always sell well, you know. You’re such a big help, Hugi-Mugi!”

When Hugi-Mugi had first moved to this part of the world, the sight of them carrying five wooden chests stacked taller than their entire body would have drawn disbelieving stares from the village folk, but the people walking by greeted them like nothing was out of the ordinary.

“If it isn’t Hugi-Mugi!”

“Hard at work with your deliveries, I see!”

Inside Shino’s shop, Hugi-Mugi saw Cartha, who worked on a nearby farm. “Hugi!” she exclaimed, her expression brightening as she ran up to them, interposing herself between them and Shino.

“Oh, Cartha!” said Hugi-Mugi. “What are you doing here, yes? Yes, what are you doing?”

“I’m just here to sell some of our farm’s vegetables. What about you, Hugi?”

“We are here to sell some weapons we found in the forest, yes! Yes, and use the money to buy some food!”

“You are? Then you should buy some of my vegetables! I’ll sell them extra cheap to *you*, Hugi!”

Shino pushed Cartha out of the way. “Wait just a moment!” she said. “You can’t do business with someone else in my shop! Hugi-Mugi was in the middle of talking to *me* just now. Don’t be a bother!”

“Excuse me?” said Cartha. “Me and Hugi are quite close, you know. Am I not allowed to speak with my friends? If we can’t do it *in* your shop, then we’ll do it outside. I trust that won’t be an issue!”

“Of course it’s an issue!” Shino snapped back. “Hugi-Mugi and I were in the middle of some friendly sales negotiations! You can jabber all you like once we’ve finished.”

“What did you say?!”

“How dare you!”

The two butted heads, glaring daggers at each other just inches apart. Hugi-Mugi sighed deeply.

“What’s wrong, you two?” they asked. “Yes, what’s wrong? Why do you keep shouting at each other? We can sell our weapons to Shino, and Cartha can sell her vegetables, and we can use the money to buy Cartha’s vegetables from Shino, yes? Yes, no problem!”

“You’re right. That’s not a problem,” said Cartha. “And perhaps afterwards, Hugi, we can eat dinner together at my place! I’ll cook something delicious, just for you!”

Hugi-Mugi grinned, making Cartha blush. “Yes, yes! Cartha’s cooking is delicious, yes!”

Once again, Shino pushed her way in between the pair. “All right, all right! But first, we need to do business! Shall we deal over a cup of tea in my room on the second story...?”

Cartha grinned triumphantly. “Oh, but weren’t you in a hurry to get those weapons on display in your shop? Are you getting distracted on the job?”

Hugi-Mugi nodded. “Let’s hurry, yes! Yes, no distractions.”

“O-Oh...” said Shino, slumping her shoulders. It looked like she was about to cry.

In the end, Hugi-Mugi bought up all the vegetables Cartha had brought to Shino’s store, as well as some meat. They left with Cartha’s wagon, which was now fuller than when she had arrived.

“Are you going to eat all of that yourself, Hugi?” Cartha asked.

Hugi-Mugi, who had been pulling the wagon as if it were light work, looked surprised. “Not at all, yes! Yes, this is for our friends!”

“Your friends?”

“Our friends, yes! Yes, our friends in the forest. The food is for them!”

“I see! But Hugi...do you know how to cook?”

“Not even a little, yes! Yes, but our friends love it raw!”

When she heard those words, a thought struck Cartha’s mind. She should cook for Hugi’s friends! They would be delighted and beg Hugi-Mugi to marry Cartha, who was so kind to all of them. She giggled, losing herself imagining her married life for a second, before remembering where she was and wiping off the line of drool that had trickled down her chin.

“I know, Hugi!” she said. “Why don’t I cook for those precious friends of yours?”

“You mean it?! They’ll be delighted, yes! Yes, delighted!”

“Hee hee! I’m sure they will! Leave it to me!” Cartha beamed as wide as she could.

The two made their way to Hugi-Mugi’s hut in the forest. Cartha, however, had no idea that what awaited her was an enormous horde of magic beasts...

Flio's house was located outside the walls of Houghtow City, right next to a forest full of dangerous magic beasts. There were no other buildings anywhere nearby. When Flio had first moved the house to its current location, it was surrounded by empty land. They had used that land to build a pasture for horses, managed by Sleip and Byleri, as well as an enormous farm run by Blossom.

In a corner of the pasture stood the stables, where the demon horses who pulled the wagons for the Fli-o'-Rys General Store slept. Half of the horses here were once elite soldiers under the command of Sleip, when he had been one of the Infernal Four. The first floor was where the wild horses they had caught made their homes, in individual stalls with straw spread out on the floor. The second and third floors were for Sleip's former soldiers, who had the ability to take human form and slept in private rooms.

In one of those rooms, Dalc Horst was lying on his bed, staring up at the ceiling. "How am I supposed to get closer to Greanyl?!" he lamented. "I've been swapping jobs with the other horses so I could be assigned to her wagon, and we've been spending a lot of time together, but she won't talk about anything other than work! And every time I ask her to eat dinner with me, she says she's gotta go do intelligence gathering and runs off somewhere!"

He sighed. "Well, it is what it is. She's so serious and hardworking—it's why I fell for her in the first place. And now I'm setting time up for us to be alone together...although we've had a lot of time alone together already at this point..." He sighed again. "With as many difficulties as I've been having, who knows when I'll be able to ask her out on a date...?"

With one final sigh, Dalc Horst pulled the blankets over his shoulders and closed his eyes. "Anyway, it's another early morning tomorrow. Better get some sleep..."

Greanyl, meanwhile, had been outside Dalc Horst's window the entire time. As a shadow demon, stealth was one of her specialties. She had concealed herself beside the window frame, eavesdropping on Dalc Horst talking to himself.

“I came here to see if I could learn why Dalc Horst had been acting so strange lately...” she said to herself, blushing red. “B-B-But is that true? H-H-He wants to go on a date with *me*? Oh... Oh, my! What could he possibly see in a scrawny, unfeminine girl like me, who’s so awkward I can’t even hold my end of a conversation...?”

Blushing to the tips of her ears, Greanyl leapt down from Dalc Horst’s third-story window, landing silently on the ground below. She pressed her palms to her forehead as she vanished into the night. “H-H-How am I possibly supposed to look Dalc Horst in the face tomorrow, now that I’ve heard all that?!”

The next morning, Dalc Horst was in his demon horse form, standing in front of the wagon and turning his head this way and that. “Strange...” he said. “I got assigned to Greanyl’s wagon again today, but I don’t see her anywhere! It’s already time to leave. It’s not like her to be late...”

Suddenly, Greanyl appeared soundlessly in the driver’s seat. “Ah, Greanyl!” Dalc Horst said. “I’d been waiting! Well, then...shall we...huh?!” His eyes opened wide. Greanyl, for some reason, was wearing a Wolf of Justice mask. “Er... Are you planning on going out like that?”

Greanyl nodded silently.

“Well...” said Dalc Horst. “It doesn’t bother me if that’s how you wanna dress...” And he set off, pulling the cart.

Aside from the mask, Greanyl looked the same as ever. But secretly, behind her mask, her face was bright red. She kept recalling the words she had heard Dalc Horst say the night before.

N-N-No way... she thought, doing her utmost to keep her heart from beating out of her chest. There’s just no way I can talk normally like this! M-M-My face feels like the surface of the sun! Oh... What do I do?! I won’t be able to apply myself properly!

◇The Celestial Plane—Central Management Tower◇

The Central Management Tower was located in the very center of the Celestial Plane, gazing down over the buildings below. In one of the tower’s

rooms, two goddesses were conversing in serious tones, poking and prodding at the viewing crystal set in front of them.

“What do you think, Celbua?” asked Zofina.

“L-Let me see...” Celbua answered. “I believe we are close to being able to reconnect with the world of Klyrode...”

The crystal had once been set to monitor the world of Klyrode, where Flio lived. But the other day, while they had been checking in on Tanyalite, the agent they had sent to infiltrate Flio’s household, the connection was somehow interrupted. Even now, the crystal still would not display images from the world of Klyrode.

“We’ve been unable to monitor that world since the viewing crystal lost its connection...” said Zofina.

“Yes...” Celbua agreed. “Leaving us unable to respond if an emergency were to occur. We must fix this before that happens, for the sake of peace in that world.”

The two kept pouring their magic into the crystal, feeding it for all they were worth. It took a bit of time, but eventually, an image gradually came into view.

“Celbua! We did it!” Zofina exclaimed.

“Yes, Lady Zofina! Just a bit more!” The two shared a smile.

But just then, the crystal made an unfortunate noise. *Kshh!*

“Wh-What was that sound?”

“I-I don’t know...” Celbua answered. “It sounded like it was coming from the crystal...”

The two goddesses looked over the crystal they were pouring their energy into, puzzled expressions clouding their faces. *Ksssshhhh!* The crystal rang out, deep rifts forming along its body. And then, with a *crack*, it split cleanly in two.

“What?!” demanded Zofina.

“Ah?!” exclaimed Celbua. The color drained out of their faces as they stared at the inert husk of the viewing crystal.

Meanwhile, in front of Flio's house, Tanya stood looking up, her arm extended skyward.

"They're certainly persistent villains," she said. "To think they would try a second time to spy on Master Flio's house! I can't imagine who these people are, but I believe I've destroyed the crystal they were using to look into this world. It will *not* happen again!"

Nodding, satisfied, Tanya looked back down at the basket she was carrying in her other arm, full to the brim with the house's laundry. "Oh, no! I mustn't waste time like this! I must hurry and dry the laundry, so I can leave to hunt for our dinner!"

And so, Tanya ran off in the direction of the drying racks.

◇The Calgosi Coast◇

"N-Ngh?! Wh-What's this?!" Captain Eddsarch of the Blackbeard Corsairs looked around at his fleet with a look of perfect confusion on his face. His ships were sinking fast, one after another. They had come face-to-face with a great fleet of military ships in formation, firing volleys of cannonballs, one after another. They struck with deadly accuracy, each hit sending one of his ships to the ocean floor.

"Impossible! I would have heard if my Junia had a navy like this! At this rate, I'll *never* have my lovey-dovey checkin time with her! C-Come on, men! Return fire!"

"A-Aye-aye, Sir!" At their captain's orders, the intact pirate ships began to fire back on the navy, but before they could reach their targets, a giant squid burst out of the sea, blocking them off.

"Gah ha ha!" laughed Polseidon, striding into the waves in his giant form. "You'll never win!" He struck the water, sending a great wave at the pirates. Rocked by the turbulence, their cannon shots went flying wildly in every direction. The navy unleashed another deadly volley, sinking more and more of Eddsarch's fleet.

"C-Captain Eddsarch!" one of his crew shouted. "A-At this rate, we're done

for!”

“Nghhhh!” Eddsarch cried. “Curse those landlubbers! That’s enough for today! Pull back!”

Cries of “Heave-ho!” rang out everywhere as the surviving pirates worked to turn the ships around to flee. But as they did, the navy closed the distance. They opened fire at close-range, their cannons nearly horizontal, putting hole after hole in what was left of Eddsarch’s fleet, which began to sink beneath the waves.

“Damn you!!!” Eddsarch cried, making unspeakably vulgar gestures at the navy ships. “Don’t think this will be enough to make me give up on my checkin with my Junia! I’ll be back! You’ll rue the day!” The water had reached above the deck. Eddsarch himself began to vanish under the water. The last to disappear from view were his gesticulating hands.

The force that had obliterated Captain Eddsarch’s Blackbeard Corsairs so utterly was none other than the former demon pirates who had been sent away by Flio and then beaten to a pulp by Zarmas. Now they bore the crest of House Van Biel on their boats.

Junia Van Biel looked out at the scene. “I-I didn’t even need to fight this time!” she said, a look of rapture on her face.

“Right?” said a small-bodied, dark-skinned woman—Rolindeim—as she stepped up to Junia. “With those demon pirates on our side, we don’t have to worry about Eddsarch’s gang at all!”

“It really looks that way,” Junia agreed, nodding happily.

Another woman was watching the scene unfold from atop a nearby boulder—Shaxablana, captain of the Ladyshark Pirates, one of Eddsarch’s allies. She had been watching the one-sided battle from start to finish, cold sweat running down her brow.

“Holy hells...” she muttered. “When did Van Biel get her hands on a powerful navy like that?! Eddsarch got all the local pirates for his fleet, but they just got wiped out like it was nothing! I wonder... There’s that rumor that says the

Magical Kingdom of Klyrode and the Dark Army went and made peace. Did the anti-demon forces take up pirate-hunting with all the free time they have now? Maybe I should think seriously about whether piracy's a good game to be in anymore..."

Following the overwhelming defeat and utter obliteration of Captain Eddsarch's pirate fleet by Junia Van Biel's new navy, news of pirate activity on the Calgosi Coast died down to almost nothing for quite some time.

◇Dark Citadel—Fli-o'-Rys Dark Citadel Branch Store◇

Belianna's eyes went wide when she entered the branch store. "N-No way..."

She had been away from the Dark Citadel for some time, officially keeping an eye on Zanzibar. When she got back, she decided to check out the new store they had set up in front of the Citadel on a whim. "*What's this damned store?*" she had said. "*I suppose I'll check it out...*"

But now, in her hand, she clutched a single one of the Wolf of Justice masks they had for sale. Back at the main branch, this had been a number one seller—it was the mask of the hero who brought peace between the Dark Army and the Magical Kingdom, after all. It was only natural that they would stock them in the new store as well.

It turned out to be a huge hit with the demons. "Whoa! Is that a Wolf of Justice mask?"

"He was our enemy, to be sure, but his strength is worth respecting."

"All right! I'll take one!"

"Me too!"

Before they knew it, it had ended up as a number one seller in the Dark Citadel too.

Belianna's eyes shot open at the scene. "Th-They were selling these, so close to the Dark Citadel! Damn! I've been caught off my damned guard!" She scooped up all the remaining masks for herself.

Belianna had faced the Wolf of Justice in battle and had been utterly

defeated. Ever since then, her respect for his overwhelming power had only grown and grown, until it became something more like infatuation. Now she was clutching the Wolf of Justice masks in her arms, her pupils going heart-shaped.

Ahh... she thought. So many of my lord Wolf of Justice's face! I could damned well die happy...

None of the fierce valor she had shown when confronting the Shadow King and the demon fox sisters was on display now. She looked like nothing more than a lovestruck maiden.

Ever since that day, Belianna began making regular visits to the Fli-o'-Rys Dark Citadel Branch Store to see if they had more Wolf of Justice merchandise in stock.

◇Houghtow City—Flio's House◇

"Easy does it..."

After returning home from the Houghtow College of Magic, Garyl went to practice his flight magic in front of the house. He had made a daily habit of practicing martial arts with Ghozal once in the morning and once in the evening, but recently, all he had wanted to do was practice flying.

"Hrm..." said Ghozal, nodding up at the boy in the sky. He had returned to Flio's house from his job at the Fli-o'-Rys General Store to help Garyl practice after school. "You've gotten pretty good. Now you just need to get good enough to fight in midair."

Garyl winced painfully. "I dunno, Uncle Ghozal... There's just no way! This seems like it's all I can do... Easy does it..." He waved his hands back and forth like he was trying to balance on a beam.

"Everyone has trouble at first," said Ghozal. "Here. Try throwing a punch." Ghozal held up his hand.

"O-Okay! I'll do what I can!" Garyl tightened his hand into a fist. "Hiyah!" He punched Ghozal's hand as hard as he could.

"H-Hrm?!" Ghozal's eyes shot open. Even though his feet were firmly on the

ground, Garyl's punch had sent him back a good ten centimeters. *Th-That was his first midair punch?! How strong is this kid?!*

A grin came over Ghozal's face. "Hrm," he said. "Not bad. Worth training, at any rate. Are you ready for today's training, boy?"

"Wha?! I gotta train *and* keep my Fly spell up?!"

"Yes! If you want to get better, then you need to train!"

"I guess that's true..." Garyl said. "All right! I'll do my best!" He screwed up his face in determination and launched another attack at Ghozal.

Ghozal was holding back, of course. He didn't launch any strikes of his own, focusing entirely on fending off Garyl's assault. Garyl was grinning happily the whole time.

Elinàsze watched the two of them from the living room window. "How peculiar..." she said. "Garyl was having so much trouble stopping in midair, but now that he's training with Uncle Ghozal, he's flying like it's second nature..."

"I wonder," said Flio. "Maybe he's going all out because he doesn't want to lose to Mister Ghozal. Your brother is quite the talented boy, you know."

"I see..." said Elinàsze. "Well, I won't lose to him either!" She grabbed hold of her father's arm. "Papa! Please train me as well! As his older sister, I would hate to lose to Garyl!"

"E-Elinàsze..." Flio protested. *Your papa still has work to do*, he was about to say, but Elinàsze was smiling so eagerly that the words died on his tongue. "All right. We can practice flying together until dinner time."

"Thank you, papa! I won't let you down!" Elinàsze was cheerful as she ran outside, dragging Flio along behind her. The four of them kept training until dinner was ready—Ghozal with Garyl, and Flio with Elinàsze.

Belano was making her way home from the Houghtow College of Magic when her eyes went wide at the sight of Garyl and Elinàsze effortlessly using their magic to fly around.

"What's the matter, Belano?" said Balirossa, who was coming home from a

different direction. "You seem surprised."

"Oh..." said Belano. "Garyl and Elinàsze are using flight magic..."

"Well, they *have* been practicing," Balirossa responded. "I suppose it's a spell they learned at school?"

Belano shook her head. "We...haven't taught them that. It's very high-level magic..."

"What? O-Oh, really!" Balirossa's eyes went wide as well. "W-Well, I suppose Lord Flio must have taught them, then..." She nodded, but she was starting to sweat as she glanced between the twins. *D-Don't tell me they were born knowing how to use flight magic! That would be impossible... B-But since they're Lord Flio's children, there's no telling what's possible or not...*



As the pair watched, Elinàsze alighted on the ground. “Oh, papa!” she said. “Look at the new spell I figured out how to use!” She held out her right arm and uttered an incantation. The jewel on her forehead, which she usually kept hidden behind her bangs, began to glow. A magic circle appeared in front of her, and a portal began to appear. It was halfway there when... “—choo!” Elinàsze sneezed. She lost concentration. The magic circle vanished and the door disappeared, halfway through being summoned.

“Oh, no!” Elinàsze cried. “And I cast Teleportation so well last time!” She puffed out her cheeks in a pout.

“That was amazing, Elinàsze!” said Flio. “You already figured out how to cast Teleportation?”

“Do you remember when you took everyone from the school to the Calgosi Coast, papa?” Elinàsze asked. “I watched you very carefully then. Although, I’m still a long way from perfect...”

“I see! Well then, let’s keep practicing until you can get it perfect every time!”

“Thank you, papa!” Elinàsze’s pout was instantly replaced by a bright smile.

Belano and Balirossa’s eyes opened even wider as they froze in shock.

“B-Belano...” said Balirossa. “D-Did you teach them how to do *that* at school?”

“N-No...” said Belano. “It’s not in the curriculum. None of the teachers know how to cast it...”

“I-I thought not...” Balirossa replied. “Only a small number of the Klyrode Magic Corps can cast that spell, I believe...”

Flio’s and his children’s abilities were simply unbelievable. Belano and Balirossa were so shocked that they didn’t move from the spot for quite some time. Before them, Garyl and Elinàsze carried on their training with Ghozal and Flio respectively, until the sun set below the mountains and the delicious smell of dinner wafted out from the kitchen.

Afterword

First, I'd like to express my condolences to those who suffered losses in the floods this summer.

With that out of the way, thank you very much for reading this book. I'm delighted to have been able to bring you Volume 6 of *Level 2 Cheat*! The print version has diverged quite a bit from the web novel, which means lots of new content. Even the scenes that were borrowed from the web novel had to be rewritten because of how much things had changed.

I'm doing my best to deliver smiles to my readers. I would like to have had better news when the book came out, but maybe it can provide some entertainment to people going through difficult times.

Flio's gotten quite busy with everything around him, but he and Rys are as lovey-dovey as they were as newlyweds. I hope you're looking forward to seeing what happens next with that pair.

And lastly, I'd like to thank Katagiri for the wonderful illustrations, the people at Overlap for their work on the publication, and everyone who read this book.

Miya Kinojo, September 2018



Chillin' in Another World
WITH **LV 2**
SUPER CHEAT POWERS

Story by Miya Kinojo
Illustrations by Katagiri

6





Bonus Short Stories

Flio's Home From Work!

◇Houghtow City—Flio's House◇

The evening sun shone down on Flio's house when a magic circle suddenly appeared in front of the main entrance. A teleportation portal emerged—a solitary door. Without missing a beat, it swung open.

Flio sighed as he stepped out. He had spent the day teleporting all over the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode, doing sales talks with people in various cities. Some of the distances he had traveled would take months by carriage. Flio was the only human in the world who could teleport that far so many times in one day. When he reached Level 2, he had obtained immense magical power. But Flio had no awareness of how strong he really was. Instead, he had deluded himself into thinking that the feats he could accomplish were normal for magic users in this world.

"I guess that does it for work," he said. "Time to head home." He stretched and then headed for the front door when he heard Wyne's voice from overhead.

"Yaaay, dada! It's dada!" She was descending fast, dragon wings on her back and a big grin on her face. Her wings closed up as she went into a dive, straight for Flio.

Wyne was still a child, but she was nevertheless the mightiest dragonewt soldier alive. Her charge was enough to level mountains. But Flio immediately began casting spell after spell—Absorb Impact, Wall of Iron, Immunity... Each was advanced magic requiring a long casting time, but Flio cast them without any incantation whatsoever. He caught her, holding her in his arms.

"Dada! Welcome home! Welcome home!"

"It's good to see you, Wyne," Flio said. "Have you been a good girl?"

Wyne beamed, rubbing her cheeks against Flio's. "Yeah! I've been a good girl all day!"

Still holding Wyne in his arms, Flio went inside.

"Gwower!" This time it was Sybe who went to pounce on him when it noticed him coming through the door. Sybe wasn't nearly as powerful as Wyne, but as a psychobear, it boasted tremendous destructive might, even when it was only playing.

The scenario played exactly like it had with Wyne. Flio immediately began casting spell after spell...and you can imagine the rest.

"I'm home, Sybe! Ah ha ha! Sybe! That tickles!" Flio grinned and laughed as the psychobear licked his face.

"Hey!" said Wyne. "No fair, Sy-Sy! I wanna lick dada's face too!" Determined not to lose to Sybe, Wyne began licking Flio's face as well.

"W-Wyne!" said Flio, a perturbed expression crossing his face. "That's enough!"

"Oh! Papa!"

"Dad! Welcome home!"

Drawn by the commotion in the entryway, Elinàsze and Garyl ran downstairs and came up to their father.

"Hello, Elinàsze! Hello, Garyl! I'm home!"

"Welcome home, papa," said Elinàsze, a bright smile on her face. "I hope your work went well?"

"Good job at work, dad!" said Garyl. "Hey, guess what happened at school!"

"Not now, Garyl!" Elinàsze scolded her brother. "Papa is tired from work! We should let him rest first."

"Fine, fine. I'll let him rest a bit."

Flio watched the twins argue with his usual easygoing smile. And then, Rys appeared.

"Welcome home, my lord husband," she said. "Dinner will be ready soon."

Why don't you relax until then?"

"Thank you, Rys!" said Flio, smiling at his wife. "Now, to the living room..."

Rys went to give Flio a hug, but with Wyne and Sybe already clinging to him and Elinàsze and Garyl crowding around, she was unable to get close. Flio gave her a wry smile. He asked Sybe to step back a bit and beckoned Rys to him with his now-empty right hand. Grinning, Rys jumped into his arms.

It wasn't as deadly a charge as Wyne's, or even Sybe's, but it was still a rather forceful tackle. So Flio began casting spell after spell...et cetera.

"Welcome home, my lord husband!"

"I'm home, Rys!"

The two embraced, smiling happily. Before long, the rest of the family had gathered as well. It looked like it was going to be a typical evening at Flio's house.

Rys's Kitchen

There were many people living at Flio's house other than Flio and his family, and the one who prepared dinner for all of them was Flio's wife, Rys. Lately, Byleri, the former archer and current manager of the pastures, had been pitching in with cooking...

"Hah!" Rys swung the knife in her hand with tremendous fervor. It diced through vegetables up and down, left and right, faster than the eye could follow.

Byleri's eyes opened wide in shock. "Whaaa!" she exclaimed. "I-I, like, totally couldn't see the knife move!" Before her eyes, Rys was peeling, dicing, and chopping vegetables with lightning speed and dividing them into bowls. She moved in a fluid, unbroken flow. Byleri merely stared, her mouth agape, unable to keep up as Rys dashed around the kitchen.

"S-So, like, Lady Rys, how long did it take you to get this good at cooking?" Byleri asked.

"I began cooking shortly after my lord husband and I married," Rys replied.

“Wha?! R-Really?!”

“Really! Up until then, I mostly ate with my subordinates. One of them was always on cooking duty. I had never cooked, myself.”

“W-Wow... That’s, like, something else!” Byleri was in awe. She watched Rys work, the knife in her hand not stopping for a single second.

“The first time I tried, all I could do was sear a hunk of unseasoned meat for my lord husband. I knew that would never do, so I enrolled in a cooking class in the city and studied as hard as I could. And now, I can use a chef’s knife to do *this*—!” She kept on cutting, faster than the eye could see.

Byleri gulped. *I-I dunno... she thought. I think Lady Rys might be, like, the only person in the world who can use a knife like that...*

“Um... Umm...” Byleri started. “I-I guess I’ll, like, take this and mix up the salad, then?”

“Yes, thank you, Byleri.”

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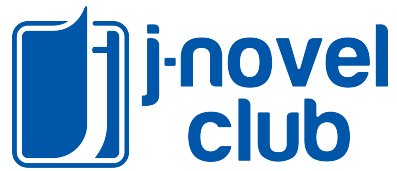
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Chillin' in Another World with Level 2 Super Cheat Powers: Volume 6

by Miya Kinojo

Translated by Meteora Edited by Samantha J. Moore

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